

Tapestry Brick Dwellings:  
The Emergence of a Residential Type in Brooklyn

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This thesis defines a previously unstudied type of residential building characteristic of the development of New York City's outer boroughs in the 1910s and 1920s, the "Tapestry Brick dwelling." It establishes its significance through two neighborhood case studies in Brooklyn: Windsor Terrace and Northeast Flatbush. The Tapestry Brick dwelling is a two-story brick residence, attached or semidetached, ornamented with patterned brick and small stone details in the façade, and a corniceless, decoratively shaped parapet. The Tapestry Brick dwelling arose in the 1910s as a stylistic innovation in one- and two-family row houses. In the 1920s, it became a common form in new, more distant neighborhoods such as Northeast Flatbush, developed following the expansion of the subway. Here, immigrant architects of chiefly Russian Jewish origin designed Tapestry Brick dwellings to house two or four families, for developers and residents of this new immigrant enclave. The thesis concludes that, as a significant architectural element of the development of New York City and the history of its immigrant communities, Tapestry Brick dwellings are worthy of preservation. It suggests that, as a neighborhood developed coherently and primarily of Tapestry Brick dwellings, which remains largely intact, Northeast Flatbush is a potential candidate as a historic district.



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The photographs in this thesis were taken by the author except where otherwise indicated.

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## Introduction

Or deep in Flatbush, in the warm *middle* afternoon.

I leave the trolley avenue and walk up a residential street....

Some of the houses are ten to fifteen years old, some are much younger; all, in their several ways, perfect images of these matings: little doubles and singles of brick and shingle or of brick and stucco or of solid brick in rows: of these latter, five in a row, rather new, are cautiously ornate and are fronted in neat patterns of bright brick the six colors of children's modeling clays: they are so prim, so undersized, they suggest dolls' homes or the illustrations of a storybook of pretty dreams....

...both the uniform and the varied strongly exist: plain cubed double-houses of dark red or brindled brick of the twenties is one kind, very common...

James Agee

*Brooklyn Is: Southeast of the Island: Travel Notes* (1939)<sup>1</sup>

At the end of his landmark history of the New York City row house, Charles Lockwood noted that in "the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Brooklyn was the home for thousands of middle-class families who lived in comfortable but architecturally undistinguished row houses along ordinary streets." Under the concluding heading, "The Demise of the Row House in New York," Lockwood continued, "Row house construction in the traditional single-family mode continued in Brooklyn on a large

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<sup>1</sup> Originally written in 1939, Agee's essay on Brooklyn was first published posthumously in *Esquire* in 1968. James Agee, *Brooklyn Is: Southeast of the Island: Travel Notes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

scale until the 1920s and in a modest two-family pattern for working and middle-class families into the present day in New York's four outer boroughs.”<sup>2</sup>

In fact, the 1920s remain the decade unsurpassed in the amount of new home construction in New York City's history. In Manhattan, whose land was mostly already developed, the growing acceptance of apartment living and the price of real estate meant that most new housing was built in the form of large apartment buildings, joining the vertical rise of the skyscrapers that became a dominant feature of the island's skyline in this period. But Manhattan's population peaked around 1910, even as the city's population continued to grow, doubling between 1900 and 1930. The city's growth happened in the outer boroughs: Brooklyn and Queens each gained nearly a million residents between 1910 and 1930. Much of shift was the result of a migration of immigrants who had first settled in congested districts of Manhattan, or the children of those immigrants, seeking better living conditions.

This movement required one of the most far-reaching transformations of New York City's landscape since the consolidation of the boroughs at the end of the nineteenth century: the development of the “more than three-quarters of the city's land area” that was farmland or otherwise unbuilt in 1910.<sup>3</sup> The more distant sections of the outer boroughs became viable for residential development with the dramatic expansion of New York City's subway system in the 1910s and 1920s. The more modest land values in these areas made possible the development of lower-scale one- and two-family houses

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Lockwood, *Bricks & Brownstone: The New York Row House, 1783-1929* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 251-253.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Derrick, *Tunneling to the Future: The Story of the Great Subway Expansion That Saved New York* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 2.

offering New Yorkers space, privacy and open-air benefits not unlike those of suburban America.

Many of the farthest neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Queens were developed in a truly suburban fashion, with freestanding single-family houses and yards and driveways. But a wide swath of new neighborhoods, in between the nineteenth-century settlements of the pre-consolidation boroughs and these suburban fringes, is today largely characterized by a common residential type: brick two-story houses, either attached or semidetached, bearing not the cornice of the old New York row house, but flat façades ornamented with patterns in the brick and modest stone details, and projecting parapets in a variety of decorative shapes: stepped, curved or crenellated. Their patterned brick style did not develop exclusively for such small dwellings, but can be seen on a variety of buildings, including commercial blocks found in the same neighborhoods, as well as apartment buildings, theaters and houses of worship, from the same period. Indeed, it is not a style peculiar to New York; even a cursory consideration of the commercial and residential architecture of other American cities in the early twentieth century yields evidence of similar trends.

But in New York, these two-story houses were a product of the outer-borough building boom that began in anticipation of the subway in the 1910s and accelerated in the 1920s. As demands for housing intensified, they went from emerging chiefly as attached single-family homes to two-family houses and even small tenements for three or four families, still within the external profile of the two-story dwelling on a twenty-foot lot. Whether it is despite, or because of, the fact that they are a common sight in so much of the city, there has been virtually no attention paid to them as a phenomenon of

architectural history, much less as bearing significance making them worthy of preservation. Despite their distinctive and recognizable appearance, there is not even a name to clearly refer to them.

This study adopts for them the name “Tapestry Brick dwelling”: Tapestry Brick to capture the defining and highly varied use of pattern brick as ornament; “dwelling” to capture the ambiguity in the residential type, in which a small, house-like form may nevertheless be a small multiple-dwelling. Focusing on Brooklyn, it investigates the historical circumstances that led to the construction of so many small brick dwellings across large parts of the borough, and the aesthetic and material influences that might have contributed to the emergence of the new flat, corniceless brick style in the hands of their architects. It will examine the development of Tapestry Brick dwellings in detail in two Brooklyn neighborhoods. Windsor Terrace, adjacent to Prospect Park, was a middle-class neighborhood already partially developed with one- and two-family row houses when some of the earliest examples of Tapestry Brick houses were built there the early 1910s. But it is also a neighborhood whose development continued into the 1920s.

The second case study, Northeast Flatbush, in contrast, is one of the neighborhoods farther out in Brooklyn that was only developed in the 1920s, out of open land, in response to the demand for housing in newly transit-accessible areas. Here, the semidetached two-story brick dwelling was always a multifamily building, not just two families, but often four, housing a more economically heterogeneous population in an outgrowth of the nearby Jewish working-class neighborhood of Brownsville.

Of course, these neighborhoods represent only a small sample of Tapestry Brick dwellings, and of local circumstances to which they were adapted, and in just one

borough at that. In both neighborhoods, many of the architects working to design such houses had particular ties to the area or to local builders, but are also found to have worked in other neighborhoods and boroughs. There is much more to learn about who designed, built and lived in Tapestry Brick houses across New York City, and about their relationship to wider architectural and social history. However, this study outlines the basic reasons that they constitute a significant artifact of New York City's twentieth-century development — one worth preserving where possible. At the very least, the case of Windsor Terrace shows how Tapestry Brick houses form part of the continuous development of the neighborhood in the early twentieth century, and thus deserve recognition in any future preservation initiative there. And the example of Northeast Flatbush, as a substantial, coherently developed and intact streetscape, offers an example of a candidate for recognizing the Tapestry Brick dwelling through a district designation.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Defining the Tapestry Brick Dwelling**

This chapter describes the category of building under study, the Tapestry Brick dwelling, enumerating the physical characteristics that define it and distinguish it from contemporaneous buildings that may share some, but not all, of its attributes. Especially because this category encompasses a large number of structures, distributed over vast areas of the city — not to mention related phenomena found outside the city — it is difficult to draw comprehensive conclusions about why such buildings were built. All the more so because the elements that define the category are so seemingly simple: a small residential building, built and decorated in brick, with a flat parapet façade. Yet this study will both establish that the convergence of these characteristics was a particular trend in parts of New York City at a particular time, and, in the neighborhood case studies, illustrate how their relationship to more specific circumstances can be understood in the context of particular locations.

In terms of overall size, shape and program, the category focuses on structures typically of two stories, serving as residences for one to four families, both attached and semidetached. In terms of materials, it deals with construction in brick. And in terms of ornamentation, it is characterized by two essential features: patterned brickwork in the façade, and a façade that is flat, without a forward-projecting cornice, having instead a parapet with a “cutout” profile. The patterned brickwork is usually garnished with small



details in limestone, cast stone or concrete, set into the brickwork and as coping to the parapet.

These various characteristics are not exclusively correlated with one another. That is, the ornamental style, and its deployment of materials, is by no means unique to small dwellings, and is found on many other kinds of buildings of the period, many designed by the same architects: larger tenements, commercial blocks, garages, theaters, and industrial buildings. The purpose of this study is to focus on the continuation and transformation of New York City's long history of row house building into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which saw this broader stylistic language applied to it intensively in the 1910s and 1920s.

## **Nomenclature**

Despite the fact that they were so widely built, constituted a stylistic departure from the Classically-inspired corniced row house, and evolved into a recognizable style, there is no existing single term for referring to these houses, or even to the style that can be said to be employed in so many kinds of buildings of the 1910s and 1920s. The large numbers of houses being constructed were usually referred to en masse as “brick homes”; advertisements might describe them in terms of historical styles that they borrowed, such as “Old English.” Individual buildings that gained notice were most likely to be described in terms of their size and amenities. But occasionally the term “tapestry brick” was used in reference to decorative brick facades. As explained below, Tapestry Brick was in fact the registered trademark of a manufacturer of face brick, Fiske & Co. However, even at the time it was vigorously promoting its trademark, the term was used generically in the press. It was also employed by architects in building plans that directed the use of

patterned brickwork without specifying complete details, suggesting that it was likely being used generically rather than as a precise product specification. I have adopted the term in the name “Tapestry Brick dwelling” because it goes some way to capture the defining, striking effect of patterned brickwork in the ornamentation. I use the term “dwelling” to encompass the residential programs contained within the two-story attached or semidetached form, which range from single-family homes to four-family tenements.

## **Program and Plan**

### *Houses and Tenements in Two Stories*

In accordance with this purpose of following the evolution of the row house, the study focuses principally on two-story houses, both those classed by the city as one- or two-family dwellings as well as certain three- and four-family tenements that retain the façade characteristics of the one- or two-family house. In the Windsor Terrace study area, which at the turn of the century had already been partly developed with brick and stone row houses, the development of brick homes in the 1910s was dominated by attached single-family houses of two stories. The few examples of three-story attached houses developed here around 1920 in fact contain two occupied stories, with the bottom floor used as a cellar and garage. In the 1920s, the single-family homes that were built in Windsor Terrace were generally more modest (Figure 1-1), and were joined increasingly by two-family houses, most often semidetached — reflecting the decade’s surge in housing demand, and a shift in the neighborhood’s population from middle-class homebuyers to more lower-middle or working-class residents.



Figure 1-1. Single-family homes, Horace Court, Windsor Terrace, 1920s.

In Northeast Flatbush, developed in the 1920s and initially inhabited by a mixture of working-class and middle-class Jews, the study follows the development not only of two-family houses similar to some seen in Windsor Terrace, but also the marked proliferation of three- and four-family dwellings. These small, semidetached tenements were, like other Tapestry Brick houses, two-story buildings on roughly 20-foot-wide lots. Also commonly seen in other Brooklyn neighborhoods newly developed at the same time, these tenements are included in this study — unlike, for example, three-story, six-family and larger apartment buildings of the same period, which may feature similar ornamental details — because their external presentation is frequently indistinguishable from two-family houses. These buildings, with a front and a rear apartment on each floor, represent the further development of the Tapestry Brick dwelling from single-family

residences to those that contain more units in response to changing housing demands. They preserve an external ideal of the house-lined street, while internally serving a greater range of households and a higher density of occupation (Figure 1-2).



Figure 1-2. Two-story streetscape, East 95th Street, Northeast Flatbush.

### *Attached and Semidetached*

Tapestry Brick dwellings are most commonly attached or semi-detached houses, reflecting their large-scale development as speculative housing. However, because the era of construction in question also saw the redevelopment of previously settled areas, as in parts of Windsor Terrace, there are also examples of individual houses, sometimes detached, commissioned and built by an individual lot owner. In Windsor Terrace, the earliest examples of houses exhibiting characteristics of the Tapestry Brick phenomenon — panels of pattern-laid brick framed in decorative coursework; flat, sculpted parapets with stone details — are attached single-family homes built in the early to mid-1910s

(Figure 1-3). More attached single-family houses were built in the 1920s, generally somewhat smaller and designed in a plainer brick style. The increasingly common two-family houses of the 1920s were usually semidetached, although there are a few three-story examples.



Figure 1-3. Attached single-family houses, Windsor Place, Windsor Terrace (architect Eisenla & Carlson, 1914).

The semidetached form is universal for the two-story Tapestry Brick two-family houses and tenements (three or four families) seen on the fringes of Windsor Terrace and predominant in Northeast Flatbush (Figure 1-4). The semidetached form not only allows for a driveway to the increasingly common rear garage, but, for the tenements, also accommodates the requirements for outward-facing windows under the 1901 New York State Tenement House Act. Many of the semidetached houses in Northeast Flatbush, and elsewhere in Brooklyn, do have an architectural feature notionally connecting them — a brick arch spanning the intervening driveway.





Figure 1-4. Semidetached four-family houses, East 95th Street, Northeast Flatbush.

## Materials

The defining material feature of the tapestry brick dwelling is, of course, brick. This encompasses both the structural use of brick for wall construction as well as the particular deployment of patterned face brick for ornamentation.<sup>4</sup> Of course, brick construction was already standard for housing within the city's fire limits, where frame construction was barred. The fire limits of the independent town of Brooklyn had been expanded in 1892, and were redefined for all of New York City in the revision of the municipal building code that took effect in 1915.<sup>5</sup> And brick façades for row houses were

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<sup>4</sup> In the 1920s, "approved cement blocks" were increasingly used for party walls, according to architects' specifications submitted to the Department of Buildings.

<sup>5</sup> "New Borough Fire Limits Decided On," *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* (henceforth *Real Estate Record*) 93, no. 2414 (June 20, 1914), 1096. Frame house

not new either. Thus, the distinguishing “brick” element of the Tapestry Brick dwelling is a function less of the structural use of brick than of its decorative deployment, which will be discussed in the following section. These ornamentation schemes usually employ a secondary material for inset details and coping — limestone, cast stone or concrete. These details often consist of one or more small, inset medallions in the shape of a diamond, a floral motif, a heraldic crest, or other conventional decorative element, often in the field of the parapet or incorporated in window or door surrounds.

Unfortunately, the paucity of original documentation and commentary about these relatively modest dwellings has left little information about the specific bricks that were used in the houses’ construction. Publications by face brick makers and trade associations in the 1910s promoted the use of decorative patterned brickwork similar to that seen in Brooklyn Tapestry Brick dwellings. These included, but were by no means limited to, Fiske & Co. of Boston, the owner of the trademark “Tapestry Brick,” a phrase that was already used generically by architects and the press to describe patterned brickwork. The examples showcased by these manufacturers were larger, more prestigious buildings, including costly residences, large apartment buildings, and public and institutional buildings. It is thus difficult to establish links between the architects or the builders of Tapestry Brick dwellings and particular brick makers. Vanity catalogs of the works of some of the architects involved in tapestry brick dwellings, including Shampan & Shampan, Koch & Wagner and Murray Klein, include advertisements by brick suppliers

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construction was common in the development of more outlying neighborhoods of the outer boroughs in the 1920s. Allan S. Gilbert, Richard B. Marrin Jr., Roger A. Wines, Garman Harbottle, “The New Netherland/New York Brick Archive at Fordham University,” *Bronx County Historical Society Journal* 29, no. 2 (Fall 1992), 58; Eleonora Schoenebaum, *Emerging Neighborhoods: The Development of Brooklyn’s Fringe Areas* (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1976), 249-250.

Miller & Martin Co. and Hay Walker Brick Co., both of New York, but these books also feature only the architects' grander building projects.<sup>6</sup> A 1913 advertisement in *Brickbuilder* magazine for the "Greendale Rug" bricks of the Hocking Valley Products Co. featured a large Windsor Terrace apartment building designed by the Cohn Brothers architectural firm, who also designed Tapestry Brick dwellings. The advertisement also depicted a row of houses on Sunnyside Avenue in Brooklyn by Winters & Thatcher, designers of brick houses for the Fred Richards company (Figure 1-5).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Selections From the Work of Murray Klein, Architect* (Brooklyn: Architectural Catalog Co.), 1931; *Recent Work of Shampian & Shampian, Architects*, (Brooklyn: Architectural Catalog Co.), 1926; *Selections From Work Designed and Erected During the Last Ten Years: Koch & Wagner, Architects* (Brooklyn: Architectural Catalog Co.), 1926.

<sup>7</sup> Advertisement in *Brickbuilder* 22, no. 12 (December 1913), xvi-xvii. Also, the *Times* reported in 1922 that the Associated Builders of Kings County was planning to purchase "several" Connecticut and Massachusetts brickyards to combat "the alleged combination" of manufacturers. *New York Times* May 13, 1922.





17TH STREET, BROOKLYN, N. Y.  
Shampan & Shampan, Architects

# “Greendales”

The Call of the Wall  
IN  
New York City  
Brooklyn  
& The Bronx



SUNNYSIDE AVENUE  
BROOKLYN, N. Y.  
Winters & Thatcher, Architects



CATON AVENUE, BROOKLYN, N. Y.  
Wortman & Braun, Architects

Shown on this page are five of the sixty-eight building operations served this year in New York City and vicinity with Greendale Rug facing brick, manufactured at Greendale, Ohio by

## Hocking Valley Products Company

**COLUMBUS OHIO**

Have you ever paused to consider the possibilities of a brick? Of the intelligent workmanship, the honest utility and the glowing beauty which may be combined in a mould of clay to make an harmonious whole? Of a brick which may be adapted to every type of building from bungalow to stately municipal halls; of a brick which wins sincere commendation from Architects, Contractors, Building Committees and even rival manufacturers alike? Such a brick is the

### GREENDALE RUG

Copyrighted, 1913

AGENTS IN ALL OF THE PRINCIPAL CITIES



COKEY ISLAND AVENUE, BROOKLYN, N. Y.  
J. Conde, Architect



HOE AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY  
Kreynberg Architectural Co., Architects

Figure 1-5. Advertisement for "Greendale Rug" brick.

In addition to those two essential material aspects of Tapestry Brick ornament — brick and either stone or concrete details — variations deploy other materials, especially in the earlier examples. In the 1910s, houses with parapets often alternated with ones bearing cornices, or had parapets that extended above a cornice. Spanish-style tile “roof” cornices — whether actually made with tile or with metal in imitation of it — or other

Spanish tile elements were particularly favored, and would remain an occasional decorative element in later tapestry brick dwellings.

Wood, generally the material used for windows, was also a prominent material in the 1910s houses that had porches, while by the 1920s, any porches were likely to be brick.

## **Ornamentation**

### *Brickwork*

Patterned brickwork is the ornamental calling card of the tapestry brick dwelling. The range of patterning techniques includes the use of varied bonds, often employing a certain bond as the façade's "background," in which are set panels framed by rowlock courses (headers facing out, with their longer sides vertical) or soldier courses (bricks oriented with the longest dimension standing vertically, narrower side out), sometimes also creating intricate patterns with fractional bricks; window and door surrounds and lintels in rowlock and/or soldier courses; and diamond-shaped accents formed by bricks, sometimes in conjunction with stone (Figures 1-6, 1-7). All of these patterns are often further heightened through the use of bricks of varying colors, be it with slight variations of yellow brick lending a speckled effect to a basic Flemish bond; or the addition of a red brick course and lintels to a predominantly yellow-brick façade; or the similar use of black bricks in red brick facades. These pattern practices are used in combinations ranging from extremely simple — e.g., one rectangular panel with a header stack bond (bricks laid header outward, directly atop each other, forming a grid with their joints) fill and rowlock border — to such a multifarious array of patterned sections that a façade hardly has a "background" bond.

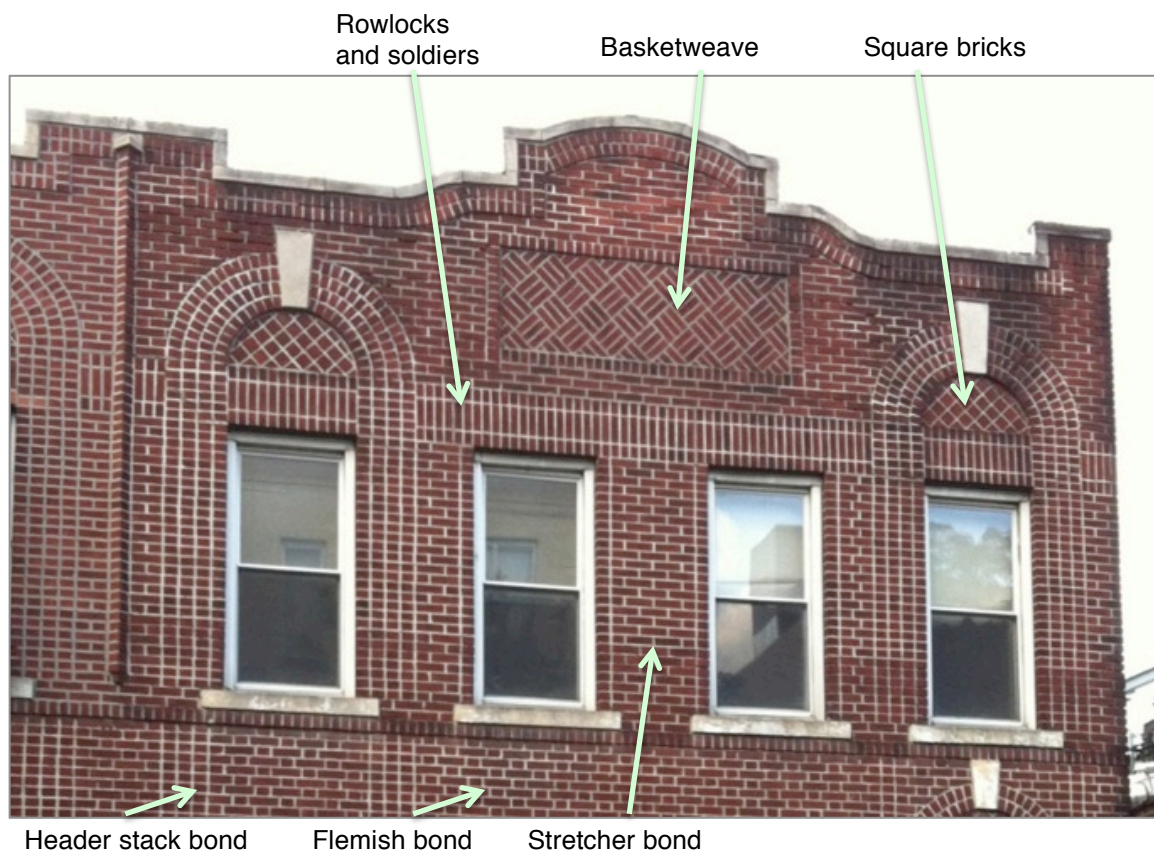


Figure 1-6. Varying bonds, framed panels of decorative patterns, 44th Street, Borough Park.



Figure 1-7. Windows framed by soldier courses (atop first-floor windows, and arched above second-floor windows) and rowlock courses (immediately atop second-floor windows, and in arched first-floor surround), West 6th Street, Bensonhurst.

Despite the salience of the brick patterns to a contemporary observer, they were rarely explicated in full detail in plans, at least in those submitted to the Department of Buildings. In fact, the brickwork (and parapet) details found on plans, at least as often as not, do not match the houses as built. This suggests the likelihood that clients were able to choose from a range of possible details at a point in the building process. One 1921 elevation blueprint by architect Paul Lubroth indicates, “Front to be laid up in a tapestry brick color selected by owner with a ½ struck point (white).”<sup>8</sup> In addition, it raises the

<sup>8</sup> Brooklyn Department of Buildings (DOB) block/lot folder 5256/125.



question of whether some of the details of the brick patterning were left to bricklayers themselves.



Figure 1-8. Unusually elaborate brickwork, 33rd Street, Sunset Park.

### *Stone and Concrete Details*

Brick patterns are usually supplemented by details either in stone or in cast stone or concrete to similar effect. These commonly include medallions or cartouches in traditional decorative forms like rosettes, shields, shells or diamond shapes, often

centered in the parapet and perhaps flanked by two subsidiary insets; pointed lozenges set into the smaller projections often found at the end of a parapet where it meets the next house, emphasizing their verticality; squares at the corners of window or door surrounds; fan-shaped transoms over front doors; and keystone shapes in arch-shaped brick designs over doors or windows. Less frequent is a course of stone molding. Sustained observation yields countless specific shapes that defy generalization. As these elements are set into the brick in some relation to its pattern, they are also often found on a building at variance from the filed plans.

These elements are complemented by the coping usually found atop the parapet in the same material. (Coping of side parapets is ordinarily tile.) Stone is also the ordinary material for windowsills.



Figure 1-9. Stone cartouche and parapet coping, West 9th Street, Bensonhurst.





Figure 1-10. Parapets with concrete semicircles with brick ring inset, East 95th Street, Northeast Flatbush.



Figure 1-11. Cast stone details on the doors and parapet of semidetached houses, Vanderbilt Street, Windsor Terrace (architect Philip Freshman, 1924).

## *Parapets*

The other primary ornamental characteristic of the tapestry brick dwelling, in addition to patterned brickwork, is the flat-fronted parapet with a shaped profile — varying combinations of stepped, curved, peaked and flat — atop a façade that generally lacks a cornice. However, as already noted, the use of a Spanish tile faux-roof section remained an occasional variation among Tapestry Brick houses.



Figure 1-12. Simple stepped parapets, 37th Street, Sunset Park.

These profiles vary tremendously, from a single simple step-up or peaked projection to asymmetrical crenellations. Most often the profile consists of a central, upwardly projecting element — for example, a flat, stepped-up section; a raised, pediment-shaped peak; a small, raised semicircle; or a broader curved silhouette with steps to either side — accompanied by smaller projections at either side of the façade, often continuous with the corresponding member of the next house. The parapets offer an



expanse of uninterrupted surface that often features the most prominent aspects of the façade brickwork, and contains the stone or other insets.

As with brick patterns, the variation in parapet shapes is tremendous. A row of houses developed together will often exhibit an alternation of two or more parapet silhouettes, allowing for a degree of variation on the individual houses and lending a rhythm to the wider streetscape.



**Figure 1-13. Varying parapets with ornate stone details and coping, Winthrop Street, Prospect Lefferts Gardens.**



Figure 1-14. Pointed parapet projections, Cleveland Street, East New York.



Figure 1-15. Crenellated and peaked parapet, 58th Street, Borough Park.





Figure 1-16. Straight horizontal parapet with blind balustrades, Albemarle Road.



Figure 1-17. Peaked parapets with faux-tile coping, President Street, Crown Heights.



Figure 118. Slight variations in parapets in a set of houses developed together on East 94th Street, Northeast Flatbush: peaked centers at left, curved at right.

### *Styles in Tapestry Brick Dwellings*

The prior history of row houses in New York City is one often defined by a succession of styles: Greek Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, etc. Some tapestry brick dwellings borrow elements of particular established styles. The combination of red brick and stone elements, such as in the form of keystone arch patterns, lent itself to a Colonial Revival flavor. The recurring role of Spanish tile beginning in the very earliest Tapestry Brick examples has been noted, and in some 1910s examples it was accompanied by a parapet in a Mission Revival-like Baroque curved shape, suggesting a strong association between the broad American vogue for Mission Revival and the development of Tapestry Brick dwellings. A vague impression of Mediterranean Revival also results from the combination of almost pottery-like patternwork and rounded parapet

profiles that is seen particularly in the red brick streetscapes of Northeast Flatbush in the 1920s.

Pointed parapet projections, protruding round-arch brick details, and truly tapestry-like diapering, sometimes found in combination, could produce a Medieval or Romanesque Revival effect. In advertisements, some developers referred to their brick houses as being of an “Old English” style, corresponding to superficial details imitating half-timbering, as well as diapering in the brickwork; at least one other referred to “Belgium Brick.”<sup>9</sup>

However, even these largely superficial historical styles are largely subsumed into a common style in the Tapestry Brick dwelling, dominated by its own essential common features: brick patterns and the shaped parapet. Ornamentation carried out at the level of the brick unit — and, some cases, the fractional brick unit — does not lend itself to the fine stylistic distinctions by which carved, sculpted or otherwise shaped materials like stone, terra cotta, wood, and metal define these pre-existing styles. The overwhelming limitation of the façade to two dimensions leads to an ornamental effect that is clearly apart from any of these styles.

#### *Possible Stylistic Sources*

Tapestry brick dwellings, constructed speculatively and en masse, were never the subject of much description in the architectural or general press, other than as “brick homes.” The records of their non-elite architects, in which the building’s designers might express their own descriptions of the styles they employed, do not survive. Therefore,

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<sup>9</sup> Advertisement in *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 10, 1913.

discussion of the origins of the Tapestry Brick style is necessarily somewhat conjectural. However, there are architectural developments in the preceding years that can be considered as possible precedents and sources on which these architects drew.

In New York City, there was a precedent for both the prominence of brickwork over applied ornament, and the flat and shaped parapet, in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century vogue for the Queen Anne row house. In the 1870s and 1880s, architects of such houses, admiring “the natural qualities of building materials... freely mixed brick and stone of different colors and textures, or employed brick laid or cut in a decorative pattern” and “abandoned the flat roofline and heavy cornice for a picturesque, large ‘A’-form gable and small dormer windows. A tile or slate roof and massive chimney enhanced the picturesque asymmetry of the roofline.” Amid a general atmosphere of “free mixing of different styles” in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century architecture, Queen Anne row houses often partook of the Romanesque Revival or of “such colonial ornament as delicate pilasters, wreaths and garlands” — with Colonial Revival emerging as a greater force of its own after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Lockwood, 231-232.



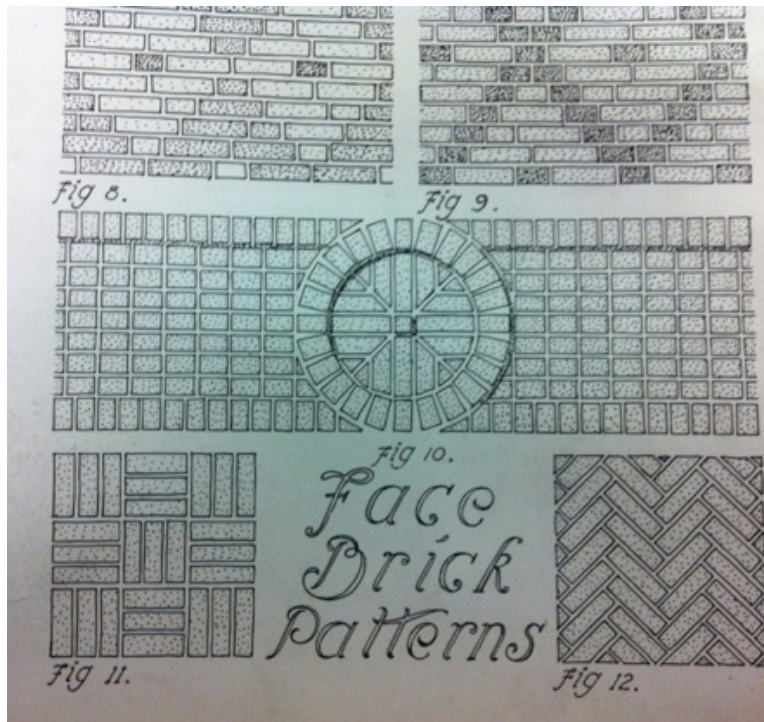


Figure 1-19. From *The Story of Brick: The Permanence, Beauty, and Economy of the Face Brick House* (Chicago: American Face Brick Association, 1920), 28.

Brick trade and company publications beginning in the early 1900s, promoting both the structural and ornamental benefits of building with brick, also offer possible clues to the sources of the array of favored brick patterns (Fig. 1-19). Though “tapestry brick” entered generic use by architects and the press to describe patterned brick, it was properly a trademark of Fiske & Co. Inc., a maker of face bricks and fire bricks based in Boston. Fiske booklets and pamphlets like “Through the Home of Tapestry Brick” and “Tapestry Brickwork” (both 1913), and the company’s showroom in the Arena Building on West 32<sup>nd</sup> Street in Manhattan, promoted the decorative possibilities of brickwork as well as its pedigree in architecture from ancient Egypt to Cass Gilbert. The American Face Brick Association in 1924 published a book on a favorite historical reference,

*English Precedent for Modern Brickwork*, with plates and drawings of “English Tudor and Georgian” brickwork, and recent U.S. architecture “in the spirit of the old work.”

These publications showcased brick patterns in colorful illustrations as well as photographs of contemporary examples (Figure 1-20). The examples are generally drawn from grander architecture than the Tapestry Brick dwelling — such as McKim, Mead & White’s Racquet and Tennis Club, or Long Island mansions by Grosvenor Atterbury or Carrère & Hastings—or, if smaller houses, they are bucolically-situated freestanding suburban cottages. But they depict brick details much like those that gained favor in the more modest urban architecture of the 1910s and 1920s. Atterbury also employed an “Old English” style of brick architecture in Forest Hills Gardens, Queens.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Pennoyer and Anne Walker, *The Architecture of Grosvenor Atterbury* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 148 ff.





Figure 1-20. From *The Story of Brick: The Permanence, Beauty, and Economy of the Face Brick House* (Chicago: American Face Brick Association, 1920), 32.

The Fiske publications also highlight a link to the Arts & Crafts movement, in which there was, as with Queen Anne, an interest in the inherent properties of building materials. A catalog of Fiske patterned-brick fireplaces illustrates them lavishly in a series of distinctly Arts & Crafts rooms (Figure 1-21). And one of Fiske's tracts on the

beauty and practicality of brickwork was in fact published as an article in *The Craftsman* in 1912.<sup>12</sup>

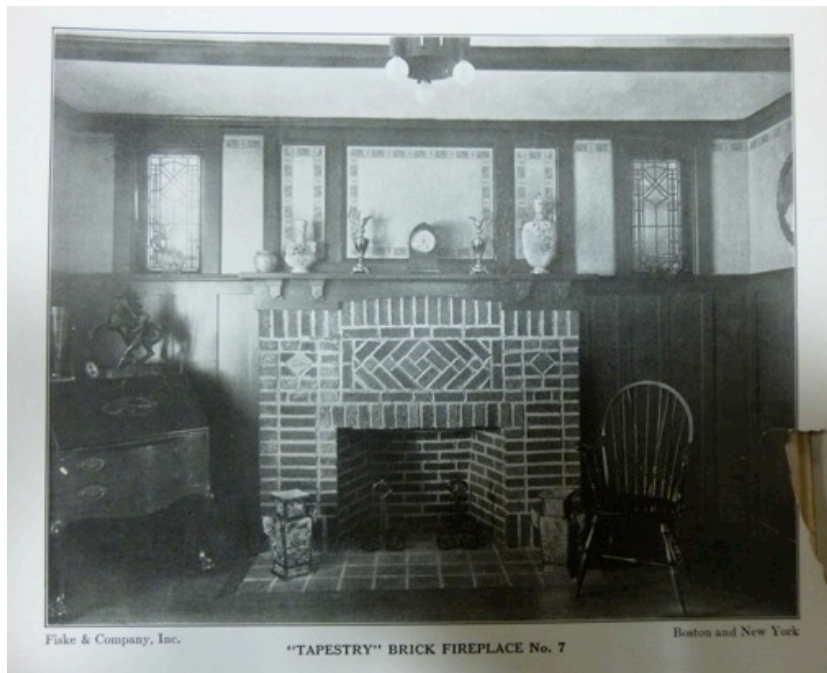


Figure 1-21. Plate from Fiske & Co.'s *Tapestry Brick Fireplaces, Illustrated* catalog no. 23 (1914).

The combination of Arts & Crafts–inspired brickwork and Spanish tile and other Mediterranean touches can also be seen in both new and renovated Manhattan townhouses in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> Atterbury and Albro & Lindeberg designed facades of flat brick with spare stone details, tipped with Spanish tile cornices, at 105-107 East 73<sup>rd</sup> Street (1903) and 59 East 77<sup>th</sup> Street (1907), respectively. A 1910 rendition of Federal style in Flemish bond brick by Delano & Aldrich at 121 East 70<sup>th</sup> Street has brick arches filled with patterned brick and stone medallions in a manner that prefigures the use

<sup>12</sup> “Practical Brick Work: Ancient and Modern: Some Points for the Home Builder,” *The Craftsman* 32, no. 3 (December 1912), 347-352.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Scott Dolkart, *The Row House Reborn: Architecture and Neighborhoods in New York City: 1908-1929* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 42-43.

of such details in more modest Tapestry Brick dwellings.<sup>14</sup> The late-nineteenth-century Dutch Revival reintroduced the crow-stepped gable, also seen in Frederick Sterner's new façade for 152 East 63<sup>rd</sup> Street (1916).<sup>15</sup>

Connections to Arts & Crafts and other national aesthetic movements are suggested by comparison with similar developments in other U.S. cities. The characteristic bungalows of Chicago's outskirts, for example, were a popular manifestation of the Arts & Crafts home, and one that exhibits brick and stone ornament—and often, Spanish tile roofing—in a way that closely parallels the New York City Tapestry Brick home (Figure 1-22).<sup>16</sup>

A 1913 advertisement by Ohio-based brick manufacturer Claycraft Brick Co., depicting a two-story foursquare house in Columbus, decoratively laid with rounded brick parapets fronting its hipped roof, is a further reminder that the Tapestry Brick dwelling as found in New York has to be considered in view of national trends in construction and ornament (Figure 1-23).

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<sup>14</sup> Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin and John Montague Massengale, *New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism 1890-1915* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1983), 348-349, 352.


<sup>15</sup> Dolkart, 52-53.

<sup>16</sup> Scott Sonoc, "Defining the Chicago Bungalow," in Dominic A. Pacyga and Charles Shanabruch, eds., *The Chicago Bungalow* (Chicago: Arcadia, 2001), 9-30.



Figure 1-22. Brick two-family houses in a bungalow style, Chicago. (Photograph by Mati Maldre, reproduced from *The Chicago Bungalow*).





Residence, Indianola Heights,  
Columbus, Ohio.

C. L. Lasche  
Architect

Buildings such as the above, with façades of

**Claycraft**  
Mingled **SHADES**

are the direct cause of brick coming into its own in this country.

This residence with its sixteen varicolored shades ranging from a coral to a deep wine in the reds, from a tan to a rich dark saffron in the browns, with an occasional metallic gun metal; harmoniously assembled; has been pronounced by an eminent architect as being the last word in artistic and tasty brick treatment.

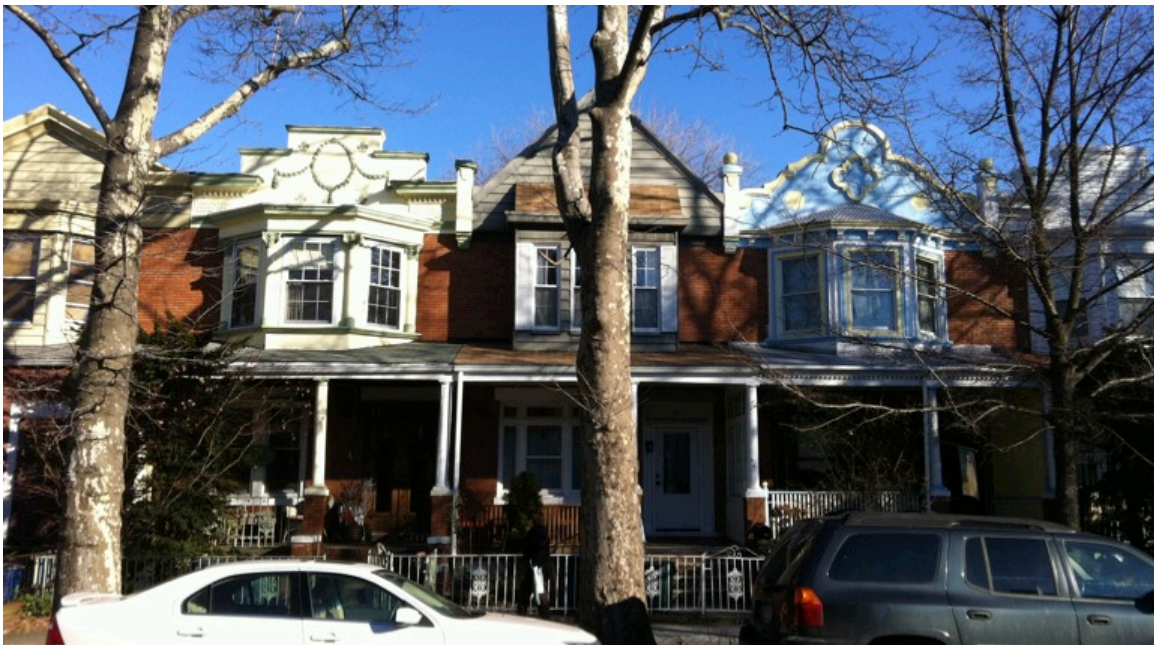
WRITE FOR BOOKLET OR SAMPLES

**Claycraft Brick Co**  
Columbus, Ohio

Figure 1-23. *Brickbuilder* magazine 22, no. 12 (December 1913), xix.

Examination of some of the earliest Tapestry Brick dwellings built in Brooklyn, along with other contemporary row houses, suggests a possible model for the prominent shaped parapet in the prior popularity of large parapets made of other materials, either in conjunction with cornices or alone. Some eclectic rows built in the early 1910s, contemporary with the earliest recognizable Tapestry Brick houses, are adorned with large pressed metal parapets in varying shapes and styles. In Windsor Terrace, on East Fourth Street north of Caton Avenue, stand the four remaining members of an original

row of eight two-story, single-family houses designed by Arthur R. Koch in 1909. Their brick façades, porches and second-story bay windows are very much like the earliest tapestry brick prototypes in Windsor Terrace of the 1910s—but with metal, not stone, parapets in stepped, steeply gabled, pedimented or Spanish Baroque shapes—the last being also the same parapet used, complete with quatrefoil medallion, in brick in Windsor Terrace and elsewhere shortly thereafter (Figure 1-24).<sup>17</sup> Koch himself went on to join the well-known Brooklyn firm of Koch & Wagner, which designed one of Windsor Terrace’s tapestry brick two-family houses in 1916.



**Figure 1-24. Metal parapet houses on East Fourth Street, Kensington.**

An illustration of a transition from cornice to metal parapet, to brick parapet, combined with the use of Spanish Tile, can be seen in the work of Axel Hedman. On

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<sup>17</sup> Another, longer row of the same houses is found on East Fourth Street south of Caton Avenue in Kensington, and other, seemingly identical ones are seen elsewhere in Brooklyn.

Maple Street between Bedford and Rogers Avenues, east of Prospect Park, Hedman, in 1909 designed limestone row houses with fronts crowned with unusual polygonal Spanish tile roofs. A row of two-story houses that he designed in 1912 on Union Street, between New York and Brooklyn Avenues, have bowed and bayed limestone Renaissance Revival facades with cornices that arise into geometric metal parapets in a variety of shapes. Hedman, at about the same time, designed another row nearby on President Street with flat brick facades and stone or concrete details, which he adorned with parapets similarly conspicuous in size and shape, but continuous with the brick and stone façade, undivided by a cornice (Figure 1-25).

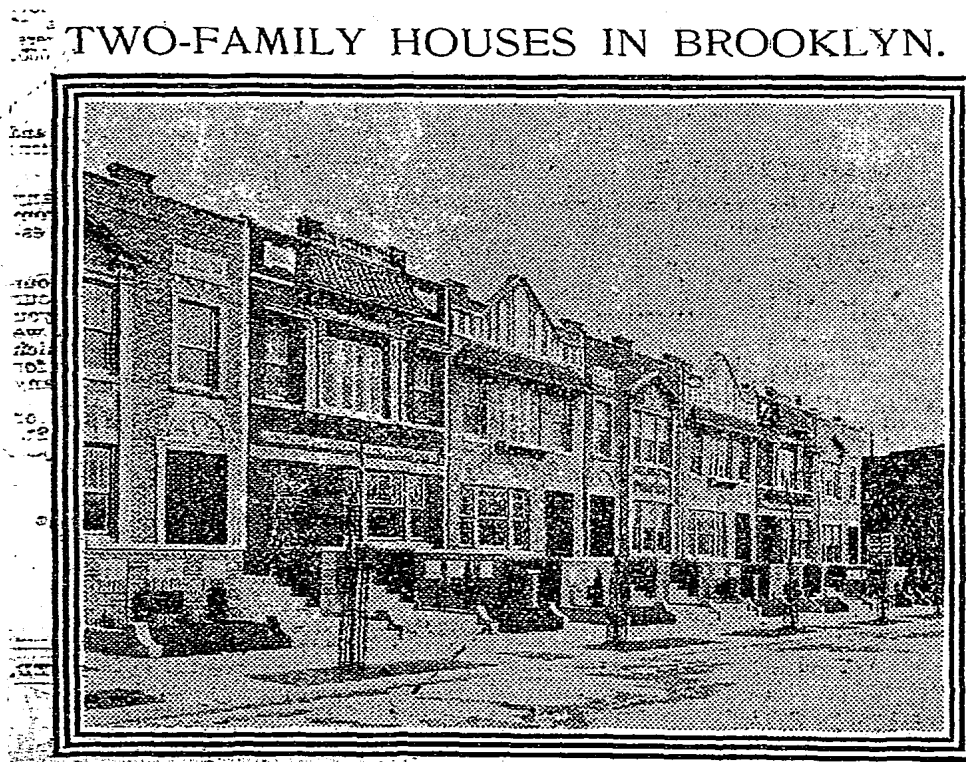


Figure 1-25. Houses by Axel Hedman for builder E.H. Bishop, President Street between New York and Nostrand Avenues (*New York Times*, March 16, 1913).

Hedman is one of a number of architects whose work indicates that the break with the prevailing ornamental conventions of New York row houses was not simply the product of a new group of architects such as the predominantly Brownsville-based and often immigrant architects responsible for designing many of the Tapestry Brick dwellings in Northeast Flatbush. In Windsor Terrace as well, the same architects were designing familiar corniced rows and the earliest Tapestry Brick houses—sometimes at virtually the same time.

### **Geographic Distribution**

An informal exploration of Brooklyn and Queens for examples of Tapestry Brick houses indicates that they can be found in more places than can be catalogued comprehensively in a study of this scope. However, in Brooklyn, they appear in the greatest concentrations in a swath of neighborhoods that generally lie beyond the older sections well established in the nineteenth century, in central and northern Brooklyn, but not as far out as the oceanside zones where freestanding single-family houses, often of frame construction, are more common.

This arc of neighborhoods includes much of Windsor Terrace, Kensington and Borough Park; parts of Sunset Park and Borough Park; many houses interspersed among other kinds in Bay Ridge; parts of Bensonhurst and Gravesend; and, to the east, parts of East Flatbush, and Crown Heights, north into Bushwick where it borders with Ridgewood, Queens (Figure 1-25). This study focuses on Brooklyn, but limited surveying also finds concentrations in analogous stretches of Queens, in Astoria, Sunnyside and Maspeth.



The Bronx was not surveyed for this study, but informal experience indicates that there are a substantial number of similar houses in that borough. And in Manhattan, related stylistic developments can be seen in larger apartment buildings, as well as in alterations to older buildings carried out in the 1920s. The only row of Tapestry Brick dwellings as considered in this study and known to the author are on Payson Avenue in Inwood

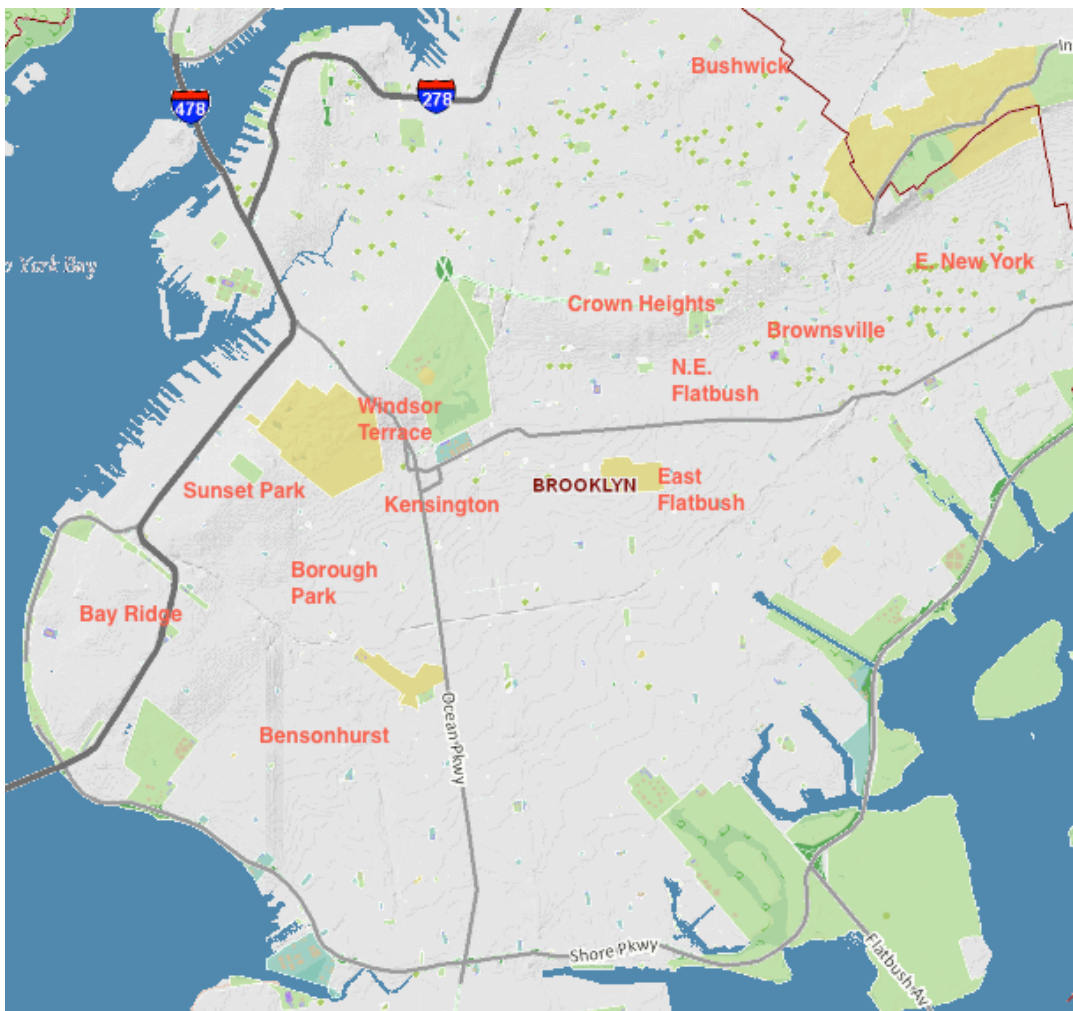


Figure 1-12. Brooklyn neighborhoods with notable concentrations of Tapestry Brick homes. (Map via OasisNYC.net)

## Chapter 2

### **Historical Context of the Brooklyn Tapestry Brick Dwelling: New York City Population, Transportation and Housing in the 1910s-20s**

The emergence of the Tapestry Brick house when and where it did was influenced by a range of historical circumstances and forces shaping New York City, as well as other cities in the United States, in the early twentieth century. After decades of rapid population growth, fueled by mass immigration, demand for more and better housing outstripped New York's supply in the early part of the century. Immigrants and their offspring "making it" in the city sought to escape densely crowded tenements for housing of a higher standard. A suspension of construction activity during World War I caused an acute housing shortage, and the pent-up demand led to a large building boom in the 1920s—the biggest decade of home construction in the city's history.<sup>1</sup> The form that this homebuilding took was shaped by government policies, particularly a real estate tax exemption in force in the early 1920s that, in Brooklyn, encouraged the development of smaller residential buildings in outlying areas with inexpensive land.

Residential development was able to push out so far into the outer boroughs only through major new developments in mass transit. The Dual Contracts for subway construction signed in 1913 constituted the largest project ever to expand transit infrastructure into undeveloped parts of the city—opening areas of central, eastern and southern Brooklyn to new real estate speculation. The 1920s were also a decade of accelerating adoption of the automobile in the United States: While auto sales had

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<sup>1</sup> Plunz, 122.

numbered about 8,000 in 1905, by 1925 they exceeded 17.5 million.<sup>2</sup> In Brooklyn and elsewhere, the car opened up the possibility of successfully developing neighborhoods farther away from transit lines—neighborhoods where homes were built with drivers in mind, with driveways and private garages.

The size, shape and materials of the dwellings constructed in the era were also determined by an array of regulations in force at the time. The New York City zoning law of 1916, while best known for the setback requirements and other regulations affecting the skyscrapers rising in Manhattan, also contained measures that protected the residential character and scale of the new outer-borough neighborhoods. Building codes, including fire limits barring frame construction in denser zones, helped dictate what materials were used in the newly built areas. Finally, while one- and two-family dwellings were not subject to the Tenement House Law of 1901, three- and four-family Tapestry Brick dwellings were subject to the light and air requirements of the law.

## **Population Growth and Housing Demand**

### *Population Growth and Mobility*

The 1910s and 1920s were at a turning point in the urbanization of the United States as a whole—the 1920 Census was the first in which the nation’s population residing in urban areas outnumbered that in rural areas.<sup>3</sup> New York City’s population grew from less than 3.5 million in 1900 to more than 5.6 million in 1920 and nearly

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<sup>2</sup> Ellen M. Snyder-Grenier, *Brooklyn! An Illustrated History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 100.

<sup>3</sup> “History: Urban and Rural Areas,” United States Census Bureau website, [http://www.census.gov/history/www/programs/geography/urban\\_and\\_rural\\_areas.html](http://www.census.gov/history/www/programs/geography/urban_and_rural_areas.html) (accessed March 1, 2013).

seven million in 1930. About two million of the city's 5.6 million residents in 1920 were first-generation immigrants.<sup>4</sup> In New York City, the 1920s were the decade that “produced a volume of new housing which has never again been equaled”: Between 1921 and 1929, there were 658,780 new units constructed, including 420,734 apartments, 106,834 one-family houses and 111,662 two-family houses. This reflected both the city's recent population growth and an upgrading of apartment standards, with more than 43,000 Old Law tenements removed from the city's housing stock between 1920 and 1929.<sup>5</sup>

This period was also a turning point in the distribution of New York's residents. Manhattan's population reached its historic peak in 1910, declining by a half million over the following twenty years. Many residents, particularly from the most crowded lower Manhattan neighborhoods, migrated to the outer boroughs, chiefly Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx. Queens grew particularly dramatically, from 284,000 people in 1910 to more than a million by 1930. Brooklyn's population grew from about 1.17 million in 1900, to 1.63 million in 1910, surpassing two million in 1920 and gaining another half million people during the 1920s. In addition, suburban counties outside the city limits saw substantial growth, notably Nassau County bordering Queens on Long Island, which grew from 55,000 people in 1900 to more than 300,000 in 1930.<sup>6</sup>

The growth of the outer boroughs included shifts in the city's first- and second-generation immigrant populations from Manhattan to new ethnic enclaves. For example,

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<sup>4</sup> Ira Ronsenwaik, *Population History of New York City* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1972), 93.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City: Dwelling Type and Social Change in the American Metropolis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 122.

<sup>6</sup> Ronsenwaik, 131-133.

in 1900, Manhattan was the home of seventy percent of the city's Italian-born population, with Brooklyn home to about twenty-five percent, but by 1920, Manhattan's share had fallen to less than half, while thirty-five percent lived in Brooklyn. Among Russians, Manhattan's share of the population fell from eighty-two percent to forty percent between 1900 and 1920, while Brooklyn's share rose from eighteen percent to forty percent. These Brooklyn colonies had larger proportions of white-collar workers, "longer-settled immigrants who probably achieved their high status in Manhattan and then moved out."<sup>7</sup> In the 1920s, "[m]ost, though not all, of Manhattan's overall demographic decline" was "attributable to the exodus of Jews."<sup>8</sup>

Not all of those moving to the new Brooklyn neighborhoods of the 1920s were migrants from Manhattan, however. East Flatbush, and the eastern part of the corridor along Eastern Parkway, for example, were immediately to the west of Brownsville, and became neighborhoods of choice for Jews able to upgrade from that crowded tenement neighborhood to homes of a more middle-class character.<sup>9</sup>

In Brooklyn this dramatic population growth was accompanied by a dramatic transformation of the borough-wide landscape. The long-settled areas of "old Brooklyn" near the East River in the north and west of the borough had already gone through cycles of development and changing uses over the nineteenth century. With advances in

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Immigrant Mobility in New York City, 1880-1915* (doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1975), 249-251.

<sup>8</sup> Annie Polland and Daniel Soyer, *New York Jews in the Age of Immigration, 1840-1920*, vol. 2 of Deborah Dash Moore, general ed., *City of Promises: A History of the Jews of New York* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 251.

<sup>9</sup> Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 22, 32; Alter F. Landesman, *Brownsville: The Birth, Development and Passing of a Jewish Community in New York* (New York: Bloch Publishing: 1971), 308.

transportation, commuter communities developed around Prospect Park and in the central Brooklyn areas of Bedford and Stuyvesant in the late nineteenth century. But it was the 1920s that saw “the rapid residential development of the flatlands of Brooklyn, southward, all the way to the sea,” finally filling up the borough under the pressure of mounting housing demands, and with the aid of a dramatic expansion of public transportation.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Postwar Housing Shortage and Tax Exemption*

The pressure on New York City’s housing market only increased with the disruption occasioned by the United States’ entry into World War I in 1917. A moratorium for the following two years created an unmet need for more than 14,000 units. Following the lifting of the moratorium in 1919, construction costs inflated by the war meant that only upscale building was undertaken, and banks were slow to resume ordinary lending activities.<sup>11</sup> A mayoral committee in 1920 estimated that there was a shortage of about 100,000 apartments.<sup>12</sup>

The housing shortage prompted an array of proposals to increase supply, including two pieces of legislation passed in 1919 that permitted the conversion of three-story houses into three-apartment buildings, and four-story houses into four units. These laws made it more financially viable to make such conversions by loosening Tenement

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<sup>10</sup> Elliot Willensky, *When Brooklyn Was the World: 1920-1957* (New York: Harmony, 1986), 69. This quote refers to the flat expense beyond the glacial ridge cutting across central Brooklyn.

<sup>11</sup> Eleonora Schoenebaum, *Emerging Neighborhoods: The Development of Brooklyn’s Fringe Areas* (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1976), 217; Andrew Scott Dolkart, *The Row House Reborn: Architecture and Neighborhoods in New York City: 1908-1929* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 68.

<sup>12</sup> “400,000 Need Apartments in New York City,” *New York Tribune*, Aug. 11, 1920.



Law requirements for such buildings, as sought particularly by Brooklyn real estate interests.<sup>13</sup> However, the *New York Times* in 1921 contended that “a close analysis” of alteration plans filed in 1921 found that the net effect was a reduction in housing facilities.<sup>14</sup> The housing question became one of the topics that a State Reconstruction Commission appointed in 1919 by Governor Alfred E. Smith was charged with examining. Its Housing Committee “concluded that the housing shortage in New York City could be addressed only through large-scale building operations on the periphery of the city where land was inexpensive.”<sup>15</sup>

The shortage prompted the New York State Legislature to enact a law permitting the exemption of new residences completed between April 1920 and April 1924 from local real estate taxes for ten years.<sup>16</sup> The tax exemption was one of an array of proposals circulating at the time for government action to encourage housing development, but opposition to more direct intervention, particularly the notion of municipally owned public housing, as “bolshevist” led to the adoption of “a lucrative indirect subsidy to private production” in the form of the tax exemption.<sup>17</sup> The state law was enabling legislation that permitted municipalities to implement exemptions to the property taxes

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<sup>13</sup> “New Tenement House Law Will Ensure 5000 Apartments,” *Real Estate Record and Guide* 103, no. 17 (April 26, 1919), 542; “Rebuilding the 3-Family House: The Burlingame Bill Signed by the Governor Will Help the Present Housing Problem,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1919; “Four Family Flats,” *New York Times*, June 22, 1919. The so-called Burlingame Bill allowed the conversion of three-story-and-basement single-family houses less than fifty-two feet in depth into three-family houses. It followed a 1917 law, known as the Lawson Bill, that had been intended to ease conversions but retained enough restrictions that they remained uneconomical.

<sup>14</sup> “Twenty Thousand Dwellings Needed,” *New York Times*, June 5, 1921. The headline referred to an estimate of the housing shortfall for Manhattan.

<sup>15</sup> Plunz, 127-128.

<sup>16</sup> Plunz, 150.

<sup>17</sup> Plunz, 150; Schoenebaum 218.

they levied. New York City in 1921 restricted its exemption to \$1,000 per room or \$5,000 per dwelling unit, in an effort to ensure that the measure promoted inexpensive rental housing rather than merely enriching developers.<sup>18</sup> The tax exemption did spark an increase in construction across the city. The number of new units completed shot up from about 11,350 in 1920 to 55,990 in 1922, most of which were in Brooklyn and Queens; in Brooklyn, more than 8,000 building permits were issued in the nineteen weeks after the city implemented the measure.<sup>19</sup> The city renewed the exemption in 1923 for housing units begun by 1924 and completed by 1926, adding a new limit of \$15,000 per entire residential building to address the fact that the measure had resulted in apartments at higher rents than intended.<sup>20</sup> The exemption was allowed to expire after 1926, after it was found that even the additional restriction had failed to effectively direct the exemption to moderately priced rental housing.

In Brooklyn, the tax exemption had substantial and wide effects, even if not the intended ones. The tax exemption was “too small” to substantially aid “cheap and moderate rental housing,” offering “little aid to a builder in downtown or central Brooklyn where high construction costs were combined with extremely high land values.” Instead, “it did promote the construction of one- and two-family moderately priced homes on the fringes of the city where land values were low enough to make construction profitable.”<sup>21</sup> Headlines of Brooklyn and Queens real estate advertisements

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<sup>18</sup> Anthony Jackson, *A Place Called Home: A History of Low-Cost Housing in Manhattan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1976), 174.

<sup>19</sup> Jackson, 175; Schoenebaum, 218.

<sup>20</sup> Plunz, 151; Jackson, 174.

<sup>21</sup> Schoenebaum, 218-219.

in the 1920s frequently trumpeted their houses' "Tax Exempt" status, often in ads for "Two-Family Brick Houses," and less often for three- or four-family houses (Figure 2-1).



Figure 2-1. Advertisements for "tax exempt" brick houses, Bay Ridge and Sunset Park/Borough Park, Brooklyn. (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Sept. 14, 1924)

All in all, between 1918 and 1929, there were 118,000 residential buildings constructed in Brooklyn, of which 58,000 were two-family houses, 46,000 were single-family houses, and 13,000 were multiple dwellings or tenements. That was up from only 47,000 new residential structures in the 1906-1915 period.<sup>22</sup>

## Transit Developments Open the Outer Boroughs

### *Transit in Brooklyn's Earlier Development*

Residential development in New York City has always been directly tied to the growth of transportation networks, and the patterns of Brooklyn's urbanization have been dependent on transportation links to Manhattan. The establishment of regular steam ferry service in 1814 led to the growth of early suburban communities near Brooklyn's

<sup>22</sup> Willensky, 74; Schoenebaum, 214-215.

waterfront; Brooklyn's industrial and commercial establishments, and the workers employed by them, were also gathered near the East River. By the mid-nineteenth century, the extension of omnibus routes made way for the development of Bedford in central Brooklyn, a process that was aided in the third quarter of the century with the introduction of horsecar lines—horse-drawn rail routes. The first bridge connection to Manhattan, the Brooklyn Bridge, which was begun in 1870 and completed in 1883, expanded and intensified this development. Park Slope developed largely with the aid of the horsecar in the decades following the bridge's opening, while parts of Flatbush became more attractive after the introduction of electric trolley cars in 1890.<sup>23</sup> Windsor Terrace, on the border of the independent Brooklyn and Flatbush before their consolidation in 1894, started growing in the early twentieth century on the strength of its trolley connections. Also appearing in Brooklyn in the 1890s were elevated railways that extended south from Downtown Brooklyn or Williamsburg to Bay Ridge and Brighton Beach, and east to Canarsie and East New York—a system then connected to Manhattan by the new East River bridges.<sup>24</sup> The elevateds led to the development not only of suburbs, but of a new, densely populated working-class district in Brownsville in eastern Brooklyn.

### *The Dual Contracts for the Subway*

New York's first subway lines were opened by the Interborough Rapid Transit Co. (IRT) in 1904 and extended to Downtown Brooklyn in 1908. Subway service deep into Brooklyn, both along existing transit corridors and new ones, came as a result of the

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<sup>23</sup> Snyder-Grenier, 91, 97, 103.

<sup>24</sup> Snyder-Grenier, 100-101; Derrick, 30.

“Dual Contracts” signed in 1913 with the IRT and the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Co. (BRT), the operator of the borough’s existing elevateds and other railroads. The Dual Contracts, nearly doubled the mileage of the city’s subway system to 621 miles, turning much of the outer boroughs into new “subway suburbs” within the “five-cent zone,” within which any journey could be undertaken for that fare. While the word “suburban” was used at the time, in this context it referred to something different from both the relatively rustic suburb that preceded it, and the later image of communities of freestanding single-family homes, often outside the boundaries of the central city.<sup>25</sup>

The Dual Contracts established a new Fourth Avenue line going farther into Bay Ridge (opened 1916-1925); new lines to Coney Island via areas of southwestern Brooklyn such as Borough Park, Bensonhurst and Gravesend (1915-1919); and opened service to central and eastern Brooklyn via an Eastern Parkway line that branched off to the south on Nostrand Avenue and farther east to New Lots (1920-1922). The New Lots extension passes on the eastern edge of East Flatbush and its Northeast Flatbush neighborhood, along East 98<sup>th</sup> Street, before heading to the east into Brownsville and East New York.

Although the Dual Contracts were finally approved in 1913, the plans had been in development for years, already spurring large-scale development. In 1912, the *New York Times* reported that “[w]hen the routes for the rapid transit roads through South Brooklyn were selected about five years ago, a very strong movement of real estate followed... hundreds of one and two family houses....a complete transformation by the erection of blocks and blocks of three story brick and stone flats with stores.” The paper noted that

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<sup>25</sup> Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 24-25.

while the subway line under discussion, the Fourth Avenue line to Bay Ridge, had not yet been built, “the houses erected have been sold principally on the strength that it will be.” It called the “most notable” development on this line the Mapleton district being built by the Alco Co. in a mortgage and life-insurance plan with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co.—a development of semidetached single-family homes designed in an early example of Tapestry Brick style.<sup>26</sup> In July 1914, the *Times*, reporting on continued real estate demand on the forthcoming subway routes, noted that Brooklyn had shown an increase of thirty-six percent in building activity over the previous year, while building had actually decreased in Manhattan and the Bronx.<sup>27</sup>

The Dual Contracts accounted for the majority of the subway service established in Brooklyn. The Independent Subway System (IND), formed in 1924 and opened between 1932 and 1940, included new service in Brooklyn. Generally speaking, the IND lines “did not open any new areas for residential development. Instead, they were intended to replace older elevated lines of the IRT and BMT, or to compete with the new Dual System lines.”<sup>28</sup> However, the IND did include a new branch that passed through Windsor Terrace, with stations that opened in 1933 at 15<sup>th</sup> Street and Prospect Park West and at Fort Hamilton Parkway and Prospect Avenue. While Windsor Terrace had begun intensified development at the turn of the century due to previous transit links, its further expansion with increasing numbers of houses for two or more families came as IND subway service was anticipated in the 1920s.

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<sup>26</sup> “New Subway Routes and Realty Values,” *New York Times*, Sept. 1, 1912.

<sup>27</sup> “Big Increase in Brooklyn’s Building Operations Due to Prospective Benefits From New Subways,” *New York Times* July 12, 1914.

<sup>28</sup> Derrick, 236-237.



### *The Automobile in Brooklyn*

The subway lines fan out as they head farther from Downtown Brooklyn, leaving large areas still far from subways, such as much of Flatlands and Sheepshead Bay. The growth of automobile ownership after World War I “enabled large developers to improve tracts beyond walking distance” of the subway.<sup>29</sup> U.S. automobile registrations expanded rapidly in the decade following World War I, “the first in which the road and the car had full impact.” While the growth of suburban towns partly reflect the impact of the automobile in this era, “a large part of the growth within cities was in sections newly opened by the car.”<sup>30</sup> Despite later becoming a city known as a contrast to the car-dependence of the rest of the United States, New York in the early decades of the automobile had high levels of usage. In 1905, 45% of the country’s cars were owned in the states of New York and New Jersey, most of those in the metropolitan area. In 1910, the city had more cars per capita than the nation as a whole. And between 1910 and 1920, the number of registrations in the city rose from 31,200 to 213,000—the ratio of persons per motor vehicle falling from 153 to 26.<sup>31</sup>

In Brooklyn, car-oriented suburbs arose in Sheepshead Bay, Canarsie, Gerritsen Beach and Flatlands where “driveways, garages, and single-family detached homes” were the norm.<sup>32</sup> Low land prices combined with the tax exemption made the development of single-family housing profitable in these areas in the 1920s.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Schoenebaum, 267.

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 175-176.

<sup>31</sup> Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 105, 174.

<sup>32</sup> Snyder-Grenier, 112.

<sup>33</sup> Schoenebaum, 237.

However, single family homes were not the only manifestation of the emerging car culture. In the 1920s, it was common for the two-family homes in both Windsor Terrace and Northeast Flatbush to be built with garages, or to have had them added shortly afterward. Even many of the four-family houses in Northeast Flatbush were built with garages, typically for two cars.

## **Planning and Building Regulations That Shaped the City**

### *The 1916 Zoning Resolution*

It may seem straightforward enough that the demand for housing, and for certain kinds of housing, in New York City was high in the 1910s and 1920s, and that land speculators and developers acted in response to that demand—with the aid of new transit lines. But in the early twentieth century, New York City was also an industrial city, and Brooklyn and Queens were home to much of that industry. It also took zoning to dictate what parts of the newly developing city would be reserved for residential use and protected from noisome activities. Although New York City’s 1916 zoning resolution “is better known for establishing high-rise building height restrictions based on street width,” this law also had this important function of “shielding growing middle-class housing areas.”<sup>34</sup> The zoning ordinance established districts defined by use, height and open-space requirements. Most of outer Brooklyn was zoned for residential use, and, at a one-times district, for low scale.<sup>35</sup> At the outer edges of Brooklyn, this included the rezoning for residential use of an existing industrially active area around Jamaica Bay, home to

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<sup>34</sup> Plunz, 123.

<sup>35</sup> Use and Height District maps, New York City Board of Estimate, 1916.

“bone-boiling establishments and fertilizer factories” that had previously been another limiting factor to development in the area.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, the zoning ordinance also helped create the demand for new housing in Brooklyn by facilitating the expansion of industrial activities beyond the waterfront “into adjoining residential sections near important roads or behind supply areas.” It opened existing primarily residential areas of “old Brooklyn” to unrestricted commercial and industrial use. Textile, chemical and metal industries expanded from Williamsburg to the south and into parts of Bedford, and into new parts of the Gowanus peninsula, spurring those who could afford it to move away to the new neighborhoods.<sup>37</sup>

### *Tenement Laws*

The most significant housing regulation in effect in the early twentieth century was the Tenement Law of 1901, which applied to “any house or building, or portion thereof, which is rented, leased, let or hired out, to be occupied, or is occupied, as the home or residence of three families or more living independently of each other, and doing their cooking upon the premises.”<sup>38</sup> The 1901 law was intended to remedy the shortcomings of the regulations in the 1879 Tenement Law, the “Old Law,” with regard to ventilation, sanitation, and maximum density, and to provide for stricter enforcement. Every room of an apartment was required to have a window of a minimum dimension opening to the exterior or onto a courtyard; new minimum areas were required for

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<sup>36</sup> Schoenebaum, 233.

<sup>37</sup> Schoenebaum, 208-212; Willensky, 73.

<sup>38</sup> As quoted in Joseph D. McGoldrick, Seymour Grabard, and Raymond J. Horowitz, *Building Regulation in New York City: A Study in Administrative Law and Procedure* (New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1944), 83.

courtyards, both interior enclosed and opening to the exterior; and all apartments had to have running water and a toilet. The new law increased the maximum area of a 25-by-100-foot lot that a tenement could cover to seventy percent, from sixty-five percent, but required stricter enforcement of this previously ignored mandate.<sup>39</sup>

The Tenement Law did not apply to the one- and two-family houses that constitute a large portion of Brooklyn's Tapestry Brick dwellings, but it did encompass the two-story, three- and four-family houses that became increasingly common in the 1920s—predominant in Northeast Flatbush, and also appearing in southern Windsor Terrace in that decade.<sup>40</sup> The semidetached arrangement of these long, narrow houses allowed them to comply with requirements for external windows and lot coverage requirements even as they mimicked smaller dwellings in their street frontage.

### *Building Codes and Fire Limits*

A principal regulation affecting the use of building materials in New York in the early twentieth century was the building code. New York City revised its building code in 1915, establishing varying requirements for fireproof construction for buildings according to their use.<sup>41</sup> The building code also set different requirements for buildings that stood inside or outside each borough's "fire limits." Within the fire limits, building new frame structures, or expanding existing ones, was prohibited, and thus brick

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<sup>39</sup> McGoldrick, et al, 81-14; Plunz, 47.

<sup>40</sup> The Brooklyn Bureau of Charities' Tenement House Committee reported in 1916 that it was concerned about the number of one- and two-family houses being built with "interior rooms," and had unsuccessfully sought to introduce a window requirement in the next revision of the building code. Brooklyn Bureau of Charities, Tenement House Committee, *The Progress of Housing Reform in Brooklyn* (Brooklyn?: 1916), 11.

<sup>41</sup> McGoldrick, et al, 89.

construction was standard. The zone outside the fire limits was known as the suburban limits, where frame construction was permitted and indeed thrived in the 1920s with the construction of detached single-family houses.

As expanded in the 1915 code, the fire limit line ran from the East River along Newtown Creek and Brooklyn's border with Queens, down to the Cemetery of the Evergreens, south through East New York, and then cutting west across Northeast Flatbush, running along the south side of Clarkson Avenue, before continuing across Brooklyn roughly along Church Avenue, 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and 60<sup>th</sup> Street to the harbor.<sup>42</sup> However, the stock of small dwellings in the neighborhood and its immediate environs is fairly consistently made up of Tapestry Brick homes on either side of the fire limits, demonstrating that the fire limits were only one factor determining the type of development in a given area.

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<sup>42</sup> "New Borough Fire Limits Decided On," *Real Estate Record* 93, no. 2414 (June 20, 1914), 1096.

## Chapter 3

### Case Study: Windsor Terrace, Brooklyn

#### Introduction to Windsor Terrace

The Brooklyn neighborhood of Windsor Terrace occupies the strip of land west of Prospect Park and east of Green-Wood Cemetery (Figure 3-1). It is bounded to the north by the extended Prospect Park West (once known as Ninth Avenue) and, to the south, by Caton Avenue. Most of the neighborhood's landscape is composed of two-story residences developed from the turn of the twentieth century through the 1920s. Although Windsor Terrace has a small number of larger apartment buildings overlooking Prospect Park and clustered in the south near Fort Hamilton Parkway and Caton Avenue, the construction of tenements was unusual enough to be remarked on as an intrusion as late as 1942.<sup>1</sup>

Intensively residential, the neighborhood's relatively small commercial strips lie on Prospect Park West, on Fort Hamilton Parkway, and on a portion of the northwest-southeast thoroughfare Prospect Avenue. The neighborhood is now bisected by the sunken Prospect Expressway, built in the 1950s to connect the Gowanus Expressway to the northwest, and Ocean Parkway, which begins at the southern end of Windsor Terrace and runs south through Brooklyn to Coney Island.

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<sup>1</sup> Citizens Committee for New York City (John B. Manbeck, consulting editor), *The Neighborhoods of Brooklyn* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 213.



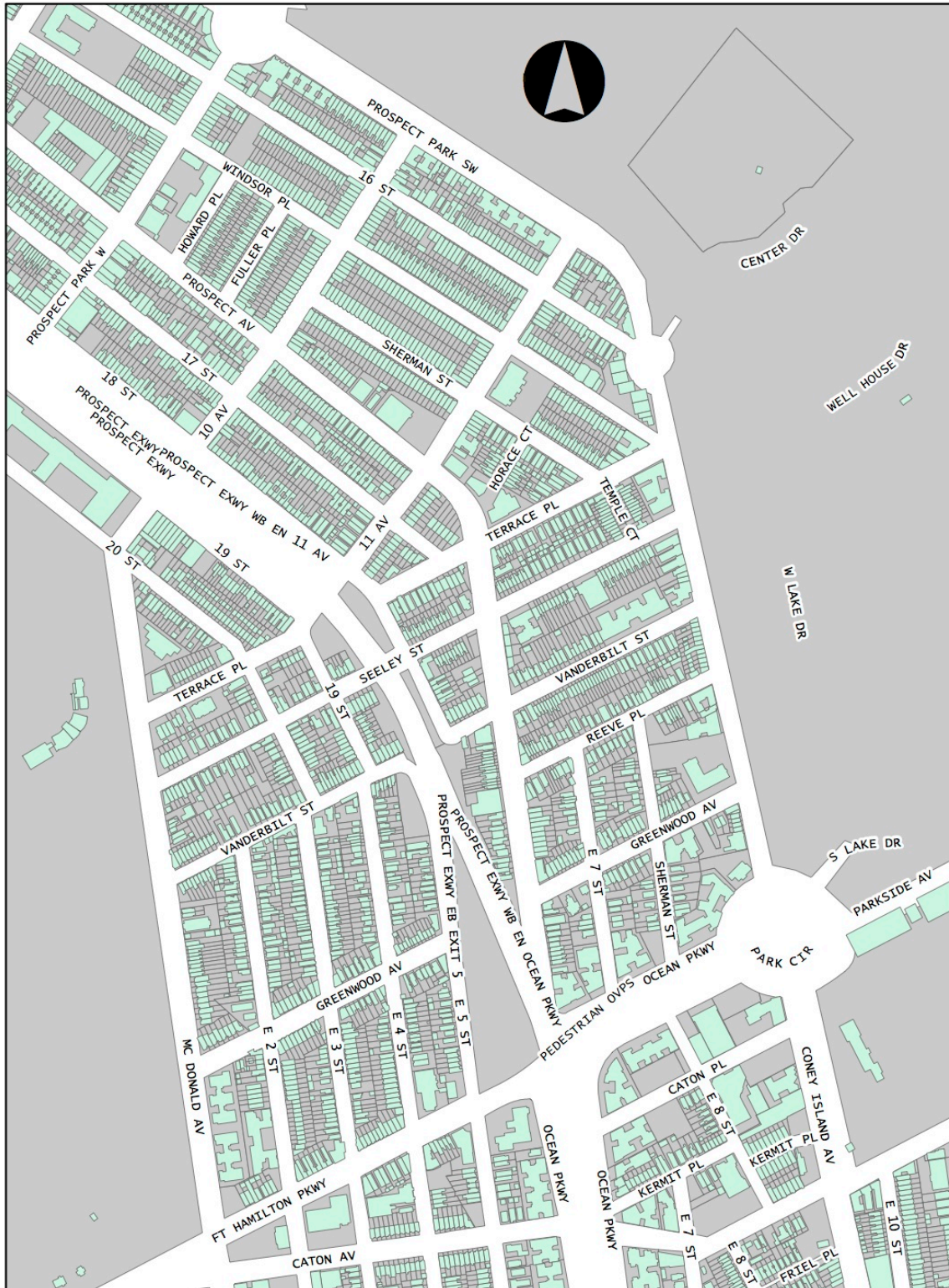


Figure 3-1. Windsor Terrace, Brooklyn, with Prospect Park at right, and Green-Wood Cemetery at left.

Though recognized as a cohesive enclave with a well defined, low-rise, residential character, Windsor Terrace has not been widely noted for its architecture. The *AIA Guide to New York City* identifies only one building in Windsor Terrace, an 1895 Romanesque Revival firehouse on Prospect Avenue, which in February 2013 became the first site in the neighborhood to be designated a landmark by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter will explain how in the 1910s and 1920s, the Tapestry Brick dwelling became a principal vehicle for Windsor Terrace's transformation from a mixed landscape of row houses, frame buildings and undeveloped land at the end of the nineteenth century, to a more densely filled-out and coherent middle-class neighborhood. It will trace the stylistic and programmatic evolution of brick-fronted one- and two-family houses in Windsor Terrace, and also look at how this evolution relates to examples of similar developments in other neighborhoods.

## **Overview of Neighborhood History**

### *Early Development and Transport Links*

The neighborhood now known as Windsor Terrace was, until the 1894 annexation of the township of Flatbush by the city of Brooklyn, divided between the two municipalities by a border running roughly east-west just south of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue. IN 1849, developer William Bell purchased two farms from the estate of John Vanderbilt, dividing them into building lots that formed the Flatbush village of Windsor Terrace, incorporated

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<sup>2</sup> Norval White & Elliott Willensky, *AIA Guide to New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press: 2010), 718; New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), "Firehouse, Engine Company 40/Hook & Ladder Company 21" designation report (2013).

in 1851. A series of blocks in the village—the southern part of today’s neighborhood—were developed in 1862, obtaining for Windsor Terrace a public school in 1876 and fire department in 1888.<sup>3</sup>

The Windsor Terrace of the late nineteenth century was a suburban, “middle class detached home community” convenient to the mass transit of the day “along the route of the trolley car from downtown Brooklyn to Green-Wood Cemetery,” as well as the Coney Island and Brooklyn Railroad, which began running horse cars from Fulton Ferry to Coney Island in 1862. Beginning in 1875, it was also served by the Prospect Park & Coney Island Railroad (the Culver Line).<sup>4</sup> Windsor Terrace in the early twentieth century was skirted by streetcar service on three sides—Ninth Avenue, Gravesend/McDonald Avenue, Prospect Park Southwest—lines that also intersected not far to the south with the cross-Brooklyn Church Avenue route. The subway line that currently stops at two ends of Windsor Terrace was not opened until 1933, though it had been anticipated as part of the Independent Subway System (IND) for years, and was itself routed along the long-established Culver surface line.<sup>5</sup>

### *Twentieth-Century Residential Development*

An 1893 land atlas of the still-independent city of Brooklyn, which encompassed the northwestern half of Windsor Terrace, shows mostly empty blocks with two clusters of construction, one along 15<sup>th</sup> Street (now Prospect Park Southwest) and 16<sup>th</sup> Street in

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<sup>3</sup> *Neighborhoods of Brooklyn*, 212; Daniel Van Pelt, *Leslie’s History of the Greater New York*, vol. 2 (New York: Arkell Publishing Co., 1898), 174.

<sup>4</sup> Schoenebaum, 102; “Brooklyn News: The Coney Island Railroad,” *New York Times*, June 23, 1882.

<sup>5</sup> “New Subway Routes in Hylan Program to Cost \$186,046,000,” *New York Times*, March 21, 1925.

the north, and another south of 17<sup>th</sup> Street (which is actually three streets south of 16<sup>th</sup>). Frame houses were scattered along these streets, with a small number of brick buildings near Ninth Avenue.<sup>6</sup> By 1911, brick houses had filled most of the section west of Tenth Avenue and north of 17<sup>th</sup> Street. The area east of Tenth Avenue remained largely empty, except for a smattering of frame houses, as well as rows of brick houses, some with stone-clad facades, on the south side of Windsor Place and both sides of Sherman Street.<sup>7</sup> The immediately surrounding block fronts would be developed in the subsequent decade, the 1910s.

In the southern, former Flatbush section of the neighborhood, a post-annexation atlas in 1906 shows the blocks around Fort Hamilton Parkway well filled in with frame houses, reflecting the area's earlier phase of development. A 1920 atlas shows areas from Sherman Street to the south still empty or predominantly frame, except for a brick cluster around Fort Hamilton Parkway. This section would be the site of the construction of numerous brick dwellings in the 1920s.<sup>8</sup>

### **The 1910s: Eclectic Early Tapestry Brick Dwellings**

The earliest of the surveyed row houses in Windsor Terrace exhibiting Tapestry Brick characteristics—that is, breaking from the corniced and often bay-fronted Neoclassical and Renaissance Revival houses of the turn of the century—were a number

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<sup>6</sup> G.W. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of Brooklyn, N.Y.* (Philadelphia: Bromley, 1893), plate 36.

<sup>7</sup> *Atlas of the Borough of Brooklyn, New York* (Brooklyn: E. Belcher Hyde, 1911), plate 31.

<sup>8</sup> *Atlas of the Borough of Brooklyn, New York* (Brooklyn: E. Belcher Hyde 1906), vol. 5, plates 22-24; Belcher Hyde, *Atlas of the Borough of Brooklyn, New York*, vol. 1 (Brooklyn, 1920).

of rows of attached single-family houses developed between 1912 and 1916 by William M. Calder (1869-1945). One group of houses is located on either side of a small, block-long street, Fuller Place, that runs from Windsor Place to Prospect Avenue, between Ninth Avenue (Prospect Park West) and Tenth Avenue. The others are between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues on both sides of 16<sup>th</sup> Street, and the north side of the next street to the south, Windsor Place. These two groups of houses, designed by two different architects—Benjamin Hudson and Arthur Carlson—exhibit a common basic ornamental characteristic, in which houses with flat, shaped parapets of brick with stone detail appear intermittently in rows of houses with a Spanish-tile parapet element.

William Calder was a Brooklyn native, the son of Alexander G. Calder, a major developer in Park Slope, where the two also collaborated in the 1890s and early 1900s, with William often serving as architect.<sup>9</sup> The younger Calder was Brooklyn superintendent of buildings from 1902 to 1905, before becoming a congressman in 1905, and serving as a U.S. senator from New York from 1917 to 1923. His William M. Calder Building Co. was incorporated in 1907. In 1922, the *New York Times* said he “may be said to have originated, or at least to have generously and profitably developed, the style of architecture known as the ‘two-family house’ ...a form of building almost peculiar to Brooklyn” that appealed especially to “newly-weds.”<sup>10</sup> At his death in 1945, he was credited with having built 3,500 homes in Park Slope, Windsor Terrace, Flatbush and Sheepshead Bay.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> LPC, “Park Slope Historic District” designation report (1973), xii, 134-138.

<sup>10</sup> “Builder Calder vs. Dr. Copeland,” *New York Times*, October 22, 1922.

<sup>11</sup> “W.M. Calder Dies; U.S. Ex-Senator, 76,” *New York Times*, March 4, 1945; William S. Pelletreau, *A History of Long Island from its Earliest Settlement to the Present Time*, vol. 3 (New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1905), 335-337.

Windsor Terrace is adjacent to the southern part of Park Slope heavily developed by the Calders. The *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* shows William Calder acquiring tracts in Windsor Terrace in 1904, including on the south side of Windsor Place and the north side of Sherman Street, both east of Tenth Avenue, as well as land on Howard Place—a one-block street parallel to Fuller.<sup>12</sup>

*Howard and Fuller Place Houses by Benjamin F. Hudson*

In 1912-13, architect Benjamin F. Hudson designed a series of house rows for Calder, in both the corniced style already seen in the neighborhood and other areas of Brooklyn, as well as in a Spanish-inflected style that began to make use of flat brick parapets. Hudson, based in Brooklyn, had designed a group of French Renaissance Revival houses on 15<sup>th</sup> Street in southern Park Slope in 1909, and, in Windsor Terrace, bay-fronted brick houses on Caton Avenue, as well as Renaissance Revival apartments and stores on Fort Hamilton Parkway. Around 1911-12 he also designed two Arts & Crafts freestanding houses in Midwood Park.<sup>13</sup> Working for Calder in Windsor Terrace, in 1912 he designed a row of two-family houses on the west side of Tenth Avenue, between Windsor and Prospect, with façades in brick with stone lintels and other trim and curved bay fronts and cornices.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Real Estate Record* 74, no. 1919 (Dec. 24, 1904), 1470; 74, no. 1920 (Dec. 31, 1904), 1531.

<sup>13</sup> LPC, “Park Slope Historic District Extension” designation report (2012), 424; “Fiske Terrace-Midwood Park Historic District” designation report (2008), 41, 150; Brooklyn Department of Buildings (DOB) property folder block 5317, lot 20, plans; block 5277, lot 6, plans.

<sup>14</sup> DOB block/lot folder 1114/91, permit NB 836-1912.

Also in 1912, Hudson designed a different row of houses for Calder on Howard Place. The twenty-three houses—single-family homes except for the deeper two-family units at each corner end of the row—have facades of light-red brick laid in a stretcher bond, and porches with Neoclassical columns. The second stories alternate two styles of surrounds for each house's set of three windows, but all of the houses boast a cornice topped by a sloping Spanish tile faux-roof parapet.

In otherwise very similar houses built the following year on both sides of nearby Fuller Place, Hudson introduced an element of variation. Every third house has, instead of the tile-crowned cornice across the top, a flat brick parapet, with a Mission Revival-like Baroque curved projection at the center, and smaller projections at each side, with a stone quatrefoil at the center of the parapet. Below this parapet is a bay window with a sloping tile roof, sitting above the front porch (Figure 3-2).





Figure 3-2. Fuller Place houses by Benjamin F. Hudson, 1913. Tile-topped cornices were also seen on the Howard Place row a year earlier; the flat parapet was introduced with the Fuller row.

This shape of parapet, complete with quatrefoil inset, was one of several kinds of profiles used in the large and extravagantly eclectic metal parapets found on the 1909 row by Arthur R. Koch (later of the firm Koch & Wagner) on East 4th Street in Windsor Terrace (as well as on a larger development by builder Otto Singer on West 8th and 9th Streets near Kings Highway in Gravesend).<sup>15</sup> It is also seen in brick, with Spanish tile cornices, in a 1912 apartment house on 8th Street east of Fifth Avenue in Brooklyn by Shampan & Shampan, who in 1920 designed a pair of Tapestry Brick dwellings in Windsor Terrace (Figure 3-3).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> DOB folder 5318/34, permit NB 6642-1909; Joseph Ditta, *Gravesend, Brooklyn* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 81.

<sup>16</sup> For Windsor Terrace houses, see DOB folder 1106/40.

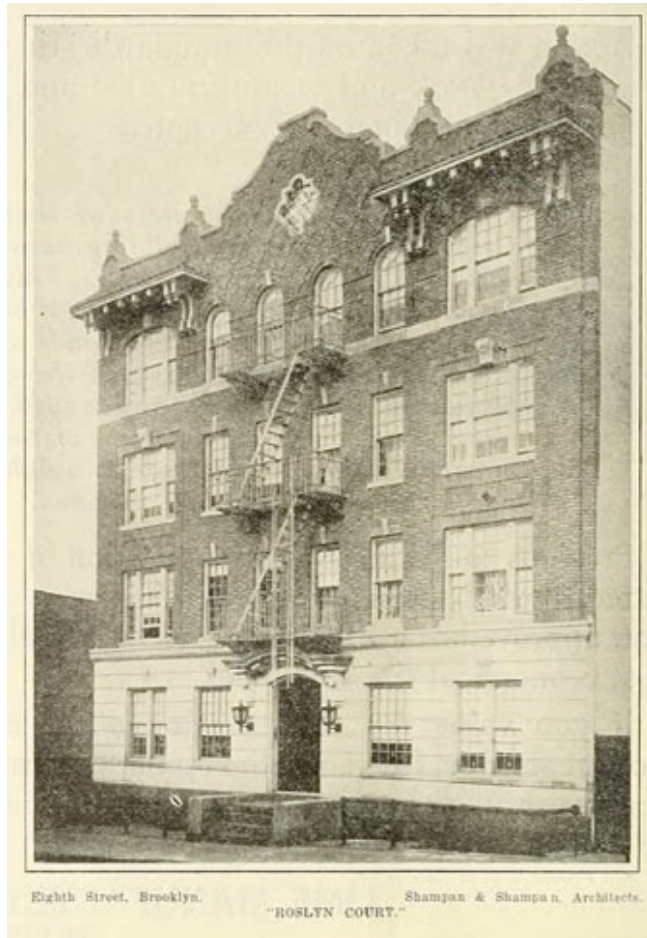


Figure 3-3. Spanish parapet and quatrefoil on the Roslyn Court apartments, Park Slope. (*Real Estate Record* 89, no. 2289 [Jan. 27, 1912], 188)

The interior plans of the seventeen-foot-wide Howard and Fuller Place houses are similar. On Howard Place, the front door leads to a small, tile-floored vestibule about three-and-a-half feet square, and thence to a hall that both has a “cased opening”—a wide, trimmed passageway without doors—to the front parlor and leads beyond it to a large “foyer hall” the width of the house. From this hall there is another cased opening—a wide, trimmed passageway without doors—back to the parlor, and, opposite, pocket doors to the dining room; a staircase (with built-in seat) rises to the second floor. The kitchen and a storeroom occupy a ten-foot-wide rear extension; the mirroring extensions

in a pair of houses form a small court over which the dining room has a rear-facing window. The main section of the house is thirty-eight feet deep, with the extension another eighteen feet, ten inches.

The second floor has a large front bedroom and two smaller, rear bedrooms—all with closets—and one bathroom, all opening off the central stair landing. The large bedroom measures sixteen feet, four inches by eleven feet, nine inches, and the smallest is eleven feet, ten inches by six feet, eight inches (Figures 3-4, 3-5).

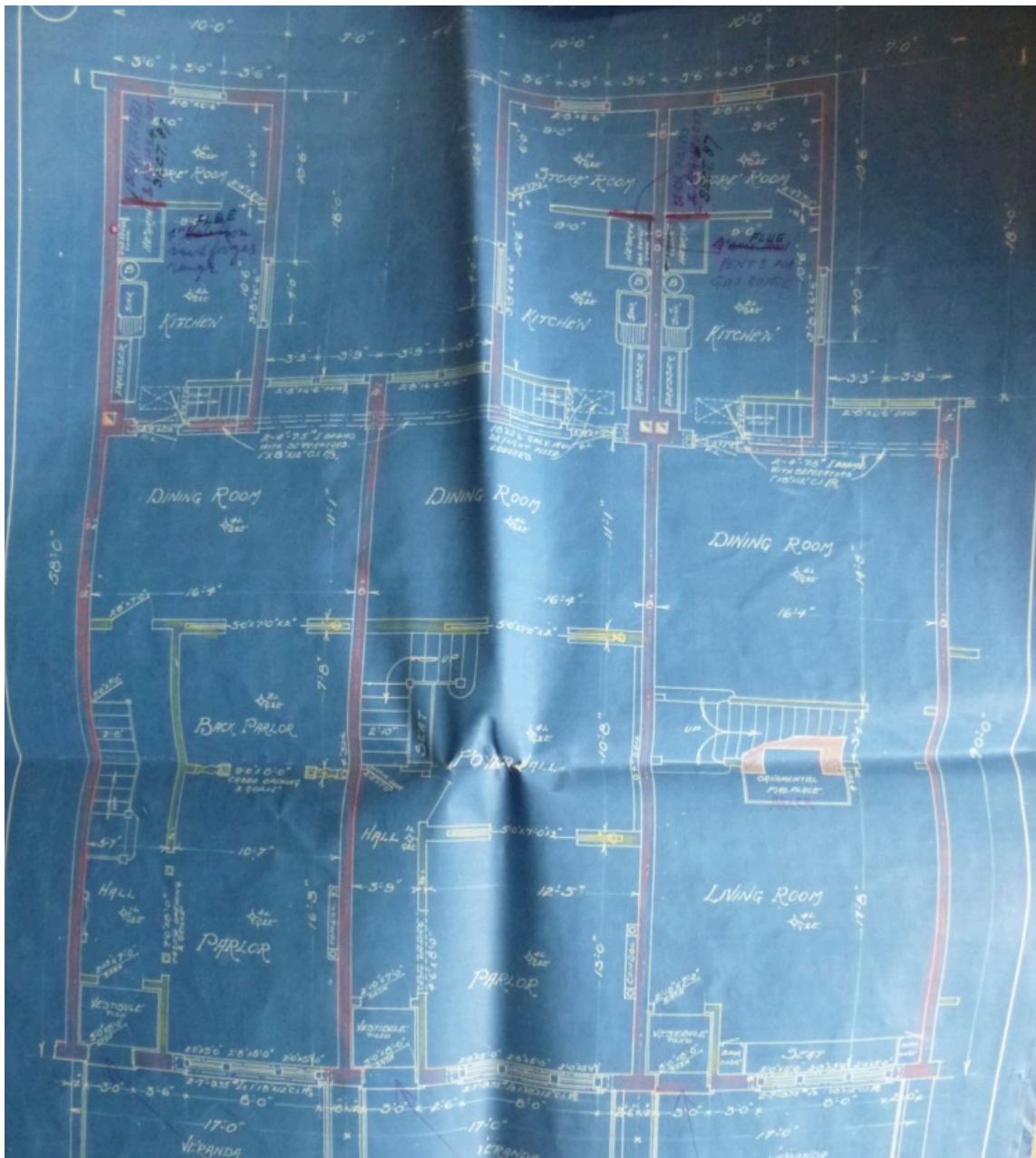


Figure 3-4. First-floor plans for Benjamin Hudson's Fuller Place houses.





Figure 3-5. Second-floor plans for Hudson's Fuller Place houses.

The houses built a year later on Fuller Place, of virtually the same dimensions, offer three variations on the basic theme, accommodated by different placements of the stairs. In addition to the Howard Place plan, there are houses in which the vestibule leads directly, with no hall, into a large living room (with “ornamental fireplace” under the

stairs), behind which is the dining room. In the third option, the entry hall opens to the parlor, with a “back parlor” behind it, not connected to the hall, and then the dining room.

This same flat parapet design went from appearing on every third house in the Fuller Place row, to being repeated on each house of a row of seven that Hudson designed for Alexander G. Calder Jr., William’s brother, to the south in the Kensington neighborhood. These houses, built in 1913 on Ocean Parkway between Beverly Road and Avenue C, are no longer standing. But advertisements in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* for these “Calder’s One-Family Houses” in the spring of 1913 show facades with the same parapets, bay window and porch, described as “On the Bungalow Order,” and boasting “7 Rooms and Bath, Parquet Floors throughout, Hardwood Trim, Steam Heat, Electric Light and Instantaneous Hot Water System Installed” (Figure 3-6).<sup>17</sup> The reference to the seven-room plan suggests a similar interior organization to the houses in Windsor Terrace. The *Eagle* a few months later reported all as having been sold: “All but One Were Purchased by Manhattanites.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* advertisement, April 26, 1913, 14; May 3, 1913, 3; *Real Estate Record* 90, no. 2328 (October 26, 1912), 782.

<sup>18</sup> *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Sept. 27, 1914, 8.

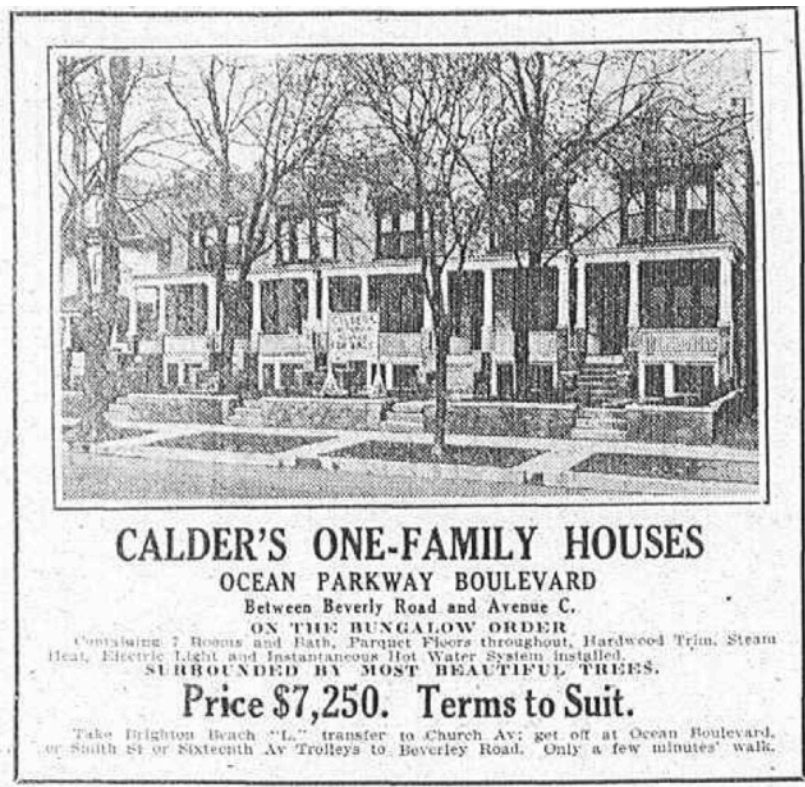


Figure 3-6. A 1913 advertisement shows Ocean Parkway houses by Hudson similar to those on Fuller Place.

*Windsor Place and 16<sup>th</sup> Street Rows by Eisenla & Carlson and Arthur Carlson*

In the mid-1910s, William M. Calder also developed a large number of single-family houses on Windsor Place and 16<sup>th</sup> Street, east of 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue. In 1914, he built a set of thirty-two single-family houses—plus a deeper, three-story, four-family building at the corner end of the row—on the north side of Windsor Place, all designed by the Brooklyn firm Eisenla & Carlson. A similar row of fifteen houses, plus a corner two-family, was built the following year on the south side of 16<sup>th</sup> Street, designed by Arthur G. Carlson following the dissolution of his partnership with Fred W. Eisenla in 1914.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *American Contractor* 35, no. 23 (June 6, 1914), 124



Carlson designed another very similar row on the north side of 16<sup>th</sup> Street—sixteen single-family houses plus a three-story, two-family on the corner of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Eisenla and Carlson were partners from as early as 1908, until 1914.<sup>20</sup> They designed a number of Neoclassical and Renaissance Revival row houses in Park Slope in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as an eclectic patterned-brick four-story tenement on Prospect Park West in 1912, and other houses and apartment buildings in Sunset Park and Bay Ridge, including the thirty-eight Renaissance Revival two-family brownstones in Bay Ridge’s National Register–listed Senator Street Historic District.<sup>21</sup>

Like Hudson’s houses, the Eisenla & Carlson and Arthur G. Carlson designs interspersed houses with a flat façade and shaped parapet, and houses with a Spanish-tile cornice, though the flat parapets outnumber the Spanish tiles two-to-one, and the Spanish cornices no longer span the entire façade, becoming a centered panel on a brick field. These houses also exhibit further elaborations in brickwork—houses in varying brick colors, the use of Flemish bond as the principal façade bond and framed panels of patterned brick, as well as more elaborate stone details.

In the 1914 and 1915 rows (the first by Eisenla & Carlson, the second by Carlson alone, but nearly identical) the Spanish tile houses are laid up in red brick, and the parapet houses in yellow brick, both in Flemish bond.<sup>22</sup> The tile cornices are flanked by parapet projections, inset with limestone details—vertical lozenges with a small, shelf-like projection—and with pointed tops, coped in limestone. The parapet houses, in yellow brick, exhibit a signature Tapestry Brick feature: a framed panel of brick in a decorative

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<sup>20</sup> *Real Estate Record* 81, no. 2085 (February 29, 1908), 365.

<sup>21</sup> Park Slope designation report, 101-102, 108-109, 112; Senator Street Historic District National Register nomination (2002).

<sup>22</sup> DOB folder 1111/45, permit NB 2307-1914; 1111/141, permit NB 1410-1925.

pattern. In this case, the panel is laid in a header stack bond, and framed below with a limestone molding that runs across the second-story triple window, and above by a rowlock course as well as the limestone “sill” of the central parapet ornament: a composition of bricks and limestone elements topped by an arched molding of Neoclassical suggestion, but also intersected by sharply pointed vertical elements (Figures 3-7, 3-8).



Figure 13. North side of Windsor Place. Eisenla & Carlson, 1914.



Figure 3-8. South side of Windsor Place, Windsor Terrace (Arthur Carlson, 1915).



Figure 3-9. North side of 16th Street, Windsor Terrace (Arthur Carlson, 1916).

Carlson's 1916 row of sixteen houses on the north side of 16<sup>th</sup> Street exhibit some differences (Figure 3-9).<sup>23</sup> The windows of the Spanish tile houses, while still projecting slightly, are arranged as a trio of single windows set into the brick façade wall, rather than as a triple window in a pressed-metal bay—that is, brick further predominates as the façade material. There is additional variation in the use of color: parapet houses appear in both red brick and yellow brick (with red brick trimming the second-story windows). In the parapet facades, the stack-bond decorative panel predominates, itself forming the main projection of the parapet, accented only by a small, slender projecting point.

The interior plans of the Eisenla & Carlson and Arthur G. Carlson houses are similar to those designed by Hudson, with nearly the same overall dimensions: seventeen feet wide, by thirty-eight feet plus an extension of roughly ten by twenty feet. The first floor of the Windsor Place Eisenla & Carlson houses are virtually identical to Hudson's Howard Place layout, with parlor, large "foyer hall" and dining room, and a similar extension for the kitchen—but the rear store room is replaced by one labeled "servants' room" (Figure 3-10). The second floor also resembles the Howard Place three-bedroom plan closely. Carlson repeated this plan, adjusting only the orientation of the stair and thus the dimensions of the foyer hall, in the next row built, on the south side of 16<sup>th</sup> Street (which, like the Windsor Place houses, were built at an estimated cost of \$4,000). The 1916 houses by Carlson (cost estimate not found) on the other side of 16<sup>th</sup> Street differ in that they lack the rear extension. The first floor contains a living room at the front, and a dining room at rear, side-by-side with a pantry and kitchen, which opens onto a small rear porch. The dining room has a triple window overlooking the rear, with a seat nestled

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<sup>23</sup> DOB folder 1107/39-40, permits NB 1405, 1406-1916.



between flanking built-in china closets. The second floor is similar to the others in its three-bedroom layout.

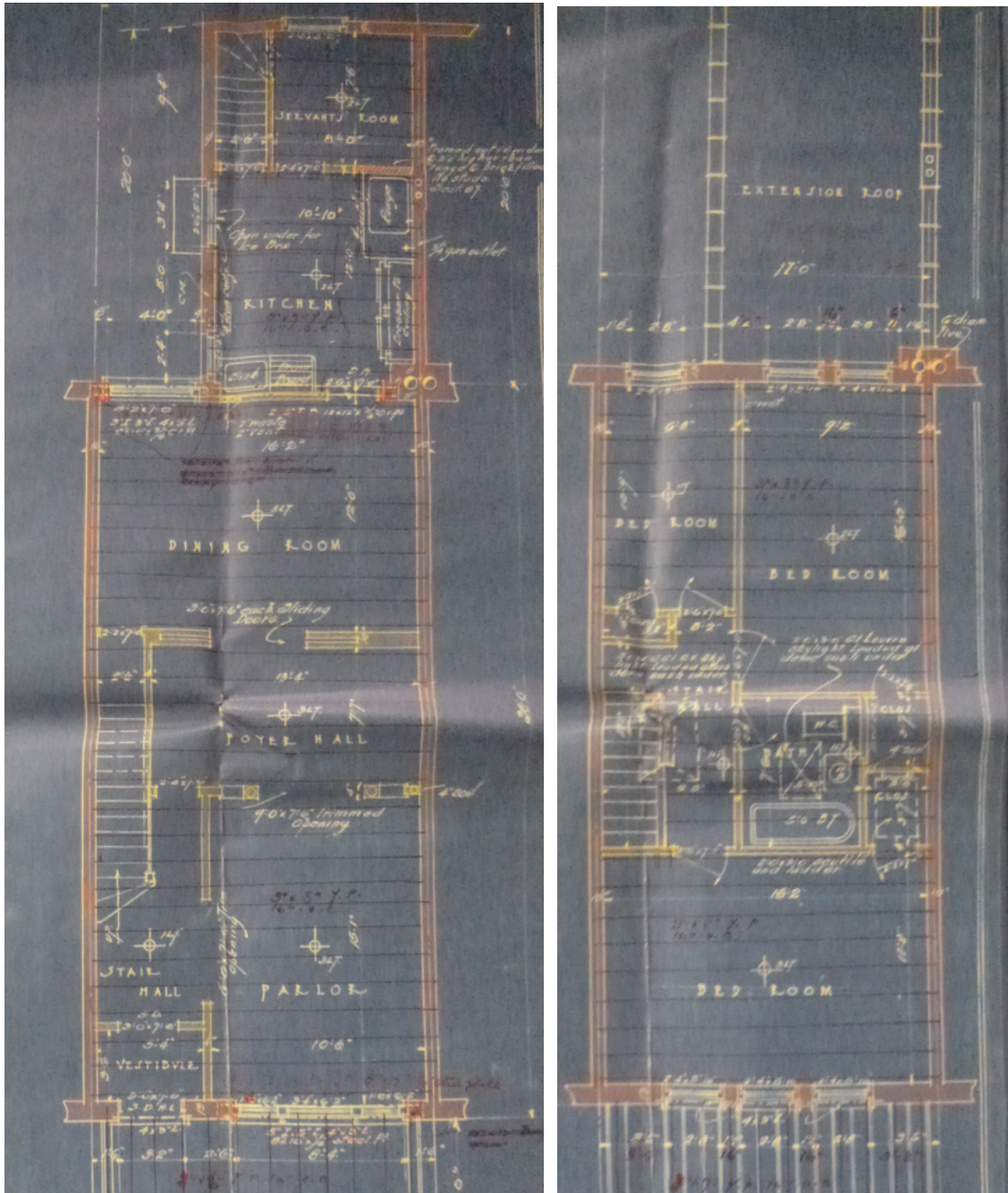


Figure 3-10. First- and second-floor plans of Arthur Carlson's houses on the south side of 16th Street (1915).

### *Occupants of the 1910s Tapestry Brick Houses*

The 1920 U.S. Census, the first conducted after the construction of these houses, gives an indication of the background and economic status of the early residents of the Tapestry Brick houses in Windsor Terrace. The Calder houses on Fuller Place and Howard were owner-occupied, with the heads of the families a mix of professional and clerical workers—salesmen, office clerks for shipping companies or publishers, real estate brokers—proprietors of small businesses such as a confectionery, and the occasional skilled worker, such as a Navy Yard machinist. Some were immigrants from European nations including Ireland, Germany, Scandinavian countries, Austria, Poland and Russia (listed as native speakers of German, Polish or Russian, rather than Yiddish, suggesting that they were likely non-Jews). Others were American-born children of such immigrants. Most households were nuclear families, with occasionally one parent or parent-in-law of the head, or unmarried siblings living together, possibly with a parent. A small number of these houses employed a European-born live-in servant.<sup>24</sup> In instances where a resident's location at the time of the previous Census, in 1910, was found, it was frequently a nearby Brooklyn neighborhood such as southern and western Park Slope.<sup>25</sup>

The Eisenla & Carlson houses on 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Windsor Place had similar owners, including lawyers (one a magistrate), a doctor, owners of a meat market and a leather goods concern—as well as a police officer and a carpenter. And again, many of these households, some of them in homes expressly designed with a servant's room, had live-in, white servants.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> 14th U.S. Census, Brooklyn, N.Y., Assembly District 12, Enumeration District 701, sheets 3A-6B (1920).

<sup>25</sup>

<sup>26</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> U.S. Census, Brooklyn, N.Y., Assembly District 12, Enumeration District 703, sheets 9A-10B (1920).

*Parallel Developments in Early Tapestry Brick*

In the early Tapestry Brick dwellings of Windsor Terrace, an emphasis on brickwork and a flat parapet emerged as a feature originally intermingled with an eclectic array of ornaments, commonly including a partial cornice with a sloping faux roof of Spanish tile. Similar phenomena—flat brick parapets combined and/or interspersed with Spanish tile—are legion in other Brooklyn neighborhoods being built up around the same time, in addition to Hudson’s Ocean Parkway houses, already noted.

Just to the south of Windsor Terrace, on Chester Avenue between Twelfth Avenue and Tehama Street, Charles G. Wessel, in 1914, designed a row of single-family houses in which Spanish-style “tile”-topped cornices (actually composed of galvanized-iron shingles) alternate with flat parapets that project up in three steps, with a brick-and-stone diamond motif at the center (Figure 3-11).<sup>27</sup> With smaller, simpler porches, skimpier stone detail, and no bay windows, Wessel’s row is a cruder version of Hudson’s on Fuller Place.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Real Estate Record* 93, no. 2413 (June 13, 1914), 1082.

<sup>28</sup> DOB Folder block 5307, lot 2; NB 2926-1915.





Figure 3-11. Chester Avenue houses, Charles Wessel, 1914.

To the east, on Vanderveer Place in Flatbush, in 1912 the Cohn Brothers firm—designers of Tapestry Brick dwellings into the 1920s—designed facing rows of attached, bay-fronted houses with varying cornices, including Spanish tile and gabled ones—with parapets protruding up in various profiles (Figure 3-12). A row of homes on 82<sup>nd</sup> Street in Bay Ridge, built by 1917 and designed by an unknown architect, is another example of the combination of flat parapet and Spanish tile (Figure 3-13).<sup>29</sup> Bay Ridge was a neighborhood that began to be transformed in the 1910s with the construction of the Fourth Avenue subway beginning in 1915.

Another row of houses in that neighborhood, on 87<sup>th</sup> Street (date and architect unknown), with simple stepped or peaked parapets, is very similar to one on President Street in Crown Heights (Figure 3-14). The earliest example of such houses encountered

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<sup>29</sup> DOB records not found, but the Belcher Hyde Brooklyn atlas 1916-1920, vol. 2 (1917), shows these houses on plate 23.

in this study are located in Crown Heights, on Lincoln Place between Utica and Schenectady Avenues, seen advertised in a 1910 newspaper (Figure 3-16).<sup>30</sup>



Figure 3-12. Vanderveer Place, Cohn Brothers, 1912.

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<sup>30</sup> Advertisement in the *Sun*, May 8, 1910.



Figure 3-13. Similar houses in (top) Bay Ridge (82nd Street) and East 26<sup>th</sup> Street, Flatbush. ..





Figure 3-14. Similar rows on 87th Street, Bay Ridge (top) and President Street, western Crown Heights.

Henry Meyer, a prolific builder in East New York and Flatbush, in 1913 offered in his “retiring sale” twenty-one single-family, “Belgium-brick front” houses on East 26<sup>th</sup>

Street in Flatbush that combine brick facades—both flat and with curved bays—stepped parapets with stone diamond insets, and large, bracketed Spanish tile cornices (Figure 3-15).<sup>31</sup> Another builder-architect duo that favored a combination of Spanish tile cornices, patterned brick, and flat parapets was the extensive collaboration between Frank Richards’ “Richards Real Homes” and architect William C. Winters, responsible for numerous single-family attached houses on Sunnyside Avenue and surrounding streets in East New York in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 3-17).<sup>32</sup>



Figure 3-15. "Belgium brick" houses built by Henry Meyer, East 26th Street, Flatbush (1913).

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<sup>31</sup> Advertisement in *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 10, 1913; “Henry Meyer” (obituary), *New York Times*, April 3, 1918.

<sup>32</sup> The East New York Project website, <http://www.tapeshare.com/Sunnyside.html>



Figure 3-16. Advertisement in the *Sun*, May 8, 1910.

Telephone Greeley 6546.

**BOROUGH OF BROOKLYN—FOR SALE.**

**MORE RICHARDS HOUSES**  
HENDRIX STREET GROUP

Between Jamaica and Sunnyside Aves. Ready June 15th; sample house open for inspection; eleven 7-room and bath Fiske tapestry brick private homes; hot water heat; instantaneous water heater; parquet floors; separate laundry; fully decorated; select neighborhood; all street improvements; one block from Highland Park; price, \$5,700; mortgage, \$3,250 (5%). Write for booklet.

**FRANK RICHARDS, Builder,**  
47 Ridgewood Ave., Brooklyn.

**MORTGAGE LOANS.**

Figure 3-17. A 1913 advertisement for "tapestry brick" homes built by Frank Richards in East New York.

The diapered brick pattern favored by Winters also appears elsewhere in flat-parapet one-family houses in a different historical mode: "Old English" homes built by another large developer, Otto Singer, on West 10<sup>th</sup> Street near Kings Highway from 1912 to 1914. Some of these houses have gabled roofs, with faux half-timbering details, but



every fifth one has a flat brick pediment with a curved crown (Figure 3-17).<sup>33</sup> They were designed by the firm of Slee & Bryson, prolific designers of row houses and freestanding dwellings.<sup>34</sup>



Figure3-17. "Old English" houses, Slee & Bryson, 1912. (*New York Tribune*, May 3, 1914)

The previously mentioned 1913 row of attached two-family houses designed by Axel Hedman for E.H. Bishop on President Street can also be characterized as an early "Old English" version of the Tapestry Brick house. Their flat brick parapets with flush stone elements include a tall triangular one in which vertical strips of brick and stone mimicking Tudor half-timbering (Figures 1-25, 3-18).

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<sup>33</sup> Illustration in *New York Tribune*, May 3, 1914.

<sup>34</sup> DOB folder 6646/22, NB 3203-1912.





Figure 3-18. Present-day view of Axel Hedman's houses on President Street, seen in the 1913 advertisement in Figure 1-25.

### *Other 1910s Houses*

As will also be seen in the construction of Tapestry Brick dwellings in Windsor Terrace in the 1920s, large-scale developers like Calder were not the only builders in the neighborhood. Windsor Terrace, as has been noted, had already been partially developed over many decades, and so there were also scattered individual lots or small lots available to be redeveloped with new brick houses by individual homeowners and other smaller property owners. One example from 1916 is notable as a work by the well-known Brooklyn firm of Koch & Wagner, and also as an example of the transition between carved stone and brickwork as the means of ornamenting houses. Koch & Wagner designed a pair of two-story, two-family houses on the north side of Fort Hamilton Parkway at numbers 3109 and 3111—detached from each other but each attached to an

existing building on the other side—for owner Anna M. Williams, residing two doors away at 3105 Fort Hamilton Parkway.<sup>35</sup>

Unlike the three-story two-family houses discussed above, these nineteen-foot houses, estimated to cost \$4,500 each, exhibit the one-unit-per-floor layout that would be common in the Tapestry Brick houses of the 1920s. They are consequently deeper: fifty-five feet, in a The first-floor units have a front and back parlor, with a bedroom behind, and a dining room in the rear; one has the kitchen also in the rear, next to the dining room, while the other actually has a very large kitchen in the cellar. The second-floor units are similar, except with an additional small bedroom in the front, next to the parlor, over the entry vestibule—a very common feature in two- and four-family Tapestry Brick houses.

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<sup>35</sup> DOB folder 5280/62, permit NB 3296-1916. Koch and Wagner had also designed a project for Williams on the same lots in 1907.



Figure 3-19. Fort Hamilton Parkway, Koch & Wagner, 1916.

Externally, the façade has common elements with 1910s houses by Carlson and Boyle (Figure 3-19). Each is laid in a slightly different shade of yellow brick in a stretcher bond, but with decorative sections of the parapet in different bonds: English for the main panel, which is crowned by a small curved projection, and adorned with a small stone diamond; and stacked headers that surround plain vertical stone lozenges in the similarly sized side projections. However, the windows are adorned with molded lintels, a stringcourse molding bisects the façade, and the door is topped by a relatively massive, projecting lintel carved with a cartouche and leaf motif, more reminiscent of the earlier

generation of corniced row houses nearby. (The plans also specify wrought-iron marquises over the front doors, not seen on the buildings today.)

Another pair of houses was built in 1916 for a local owner at 103 and 105 McDonald Avenue (then known as Gravesend Avenue, with the houses then numbered 101 and 103).<sup>36</sup> The owner was Joseph Schmitt of 109 Gravesend Avenue, and the architect was Richard vom Lehn Sons, which was also a building concern widely active in Brooklyn. These two relatively small (fifteen feet, six inches by twenty-eight feet, two stories, plus nine-by-ten extension) attached houses were each built for a single family at an estimated cost of only \$2,000 apiece. Their simple plan—parlor and dining room on the first floor, with kitchen in the extension, and no hallway, plus three bedrooms upstairs—prefigures the more modest plans that would characterize many single-family Tapestry Brick dwellings of the 1920s. So do their facades, which, with minimal stone trim, rely on brickwork and a parapet with a peaked profile as their ornament (Figure 3-20).

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<sup>36</sup> DOB folder 5264/7, permit NB 503-1916.



Figure 3-20. Architects's elevation of 103-105 Macdonald Avenue, Windsor Terrace (Richard vom Lehn Sons, 1916)

### *Calder's Postwar Three-Story, Two Family Houses*

Little building activity is found in Windsor Terrace in the latter half of the 1910s, as World War I interrupted construction across the city. In 1919, the year following the end of the war, Calder did build two other sets of brick homes in Windsor Terrace, again in collaboration with Arthur G. Carlson, who by this time had joined a new partnership with Harrison G. Wiseman. Both of these were rows of three-story buildings, but built for two families. They both lack porches, and thus have purely flat facades. On the south side of 16<sup>th</sup> Street—just to the west of the 1915 Carlson row—is a row of five houses that Carlson & Wiseman designed in a Colonial Revival style, with red Flemish bond brick, a



stone stringcourse, blind semicircular transoms over the front doors, some of which are framed with Neoclassical pilasters topped with pediments; windows alternate between having splayed stone lintels and rowlock arches. Blank patches on the pediment now mark where there once had been separate Neoclassical cornices (again, not reaching the sides of the building) that sat below the edge of the brick parapet (Figure 3-21).<sup>37</sup>



Figure 3-21. Colonial revival houses by Carlson & Wiseman (1919), 16th Street, Windsor Terrace.

In these houses—about eighteen feet wide and fifty-two feet deep, plus an eight foot porch—the ground floor originally contained a cellar and a garage accessed from the rear, and an apartment on each floor above. The stair hall opens onto both a central foyer and the parlor, which occupies part of the front of the building, with a small bedroom adjoining it. Behind the parlor is either a back parlor or a bedroom, followed by another bedroom with bath opposite the private hall, and dining room and kitchen at rear—for a

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<sup>37</sup> DOB folder 1111/14, permit NB 5665-1919.

total of either two or three bedrooms, ranging from six feet, eight inches by ten feet, to about ten by ten feet.

Also in 1919, Calder built another row of five Carlson & Wiseman–designed houses at the southeast corner of Eleventh Avenue and 16<sup>th</sup> Street, with a similar three-bedroom plan to the previously described houses, also with the cellar and rear-accessed garage on the first floor—construction costs estimated at \$8,500 (Figure 3-22).<sup>38</sup>

Externally, these houses suggest a further refining of the elements seen in the earlier, one family Carlson rows. There is no porch, instead a monolithic, yellow-brick flat façade, with a simple three-by-three grid of single sash windows. Two styles of the facade alternate. One has an almost vestigially shallow and narrow Spanish-tile parapet, with side projections bearing embedded vertical stone lozenges. These vertical sections continue down each side of the building, with the brick recessed every seventh course, forming bands. A stone string courses runs the entire block front below the second-story windows; another, molded course runs across the houses atop the first-story windows. The upper-floor windows are framed with pale red rowlocks that also form squares between each second- and third-story window.

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<sup>38</sup> DOB folder 5258/6, permit NB 4756-1919





Figure 3-22. Three-story, two-family houses by Arthur Carlson at 11th Avenue and 16th Street, Windsor Terrace (1919).

The other façade design has a crenellated parapet edge, a trio of square limestone plaques bearing quatrefoils within the parapet face (which is trimmed in pale red rowlock courses), these stone elements being echoed by three rectangular plaques with diamond motifs between the second and third floors.

Calder, in 1921, built another group of three-story, two family houses, in two adjacent and similar-looking groups: four semidetached buildings on Prospect Park Southwest at its southeast corner with Eleventh Avenue, and a row of five attached houses on that block of Eleventh Avenue (Figure 3-23). These houses, all with one unit on the first two floors, and a second on the third floor, have red-brick facades with a more elaborate version of the Colonial Revival-inflected Tapestry Brick of the 1919 row in that style by Carlson & Wiseman. However, they were designed by another architect, James

A. Boyle, who would come to play a large role in the development of Tapestry Brick dwellings in Windsor Terrace during the 1920s, in concert with another developer, as will be seen in the next section of this chapter. Boyle also continued to design houses for William M. Calder as the developer spread out his operations to wider areas of Brooklyn.<sup>39</sup>



**Figure 3-23.. Three-story, two-family houses, Prospect Park Southwest (left) and 11th Avenue, James Boyle, 1921.**

The houses on 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue have two very different layouts for the two-story apartment: one with a familiar arrangement of living room, dining room and kitchen on the first floor, and four bedrooms on the second; and the other with a living room, bedroom and store room on the first (Figures 3-24, 3-25, 3-26).<sup>40</sup> On the second floor, the stairs lead to a central hall, with a second living room and adjoining bedroom in the front, the dining room behind them, the bath at center, with two bedrooms behind it—and the

<sup>39</sup> A half-page advertisement in a 1930 *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, for “Calder’s Perfect Homes” on Troy Avenue in East Flatbush, lists dozens of contractors associated with Calder Homes, including “James A. Boyle, Architect” (Sept. 28, 1930).

<sup>40</sup> DOB folder 5259/5, permit NB 7247-1921.

kitchen in the rear, at the opposite end of the hall from the dining room. The third floors all have three-bedroom apartments with layout elements patterned on the units beneath. On Prospect Park Southwest, the houses have a layout similar to the more traditional one found on 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue, except with a “Maid’s bed room” and bath carved out of the kitchen space.<sup>41</sup> The bedrooms in both sets of houses, while ranging in size, are significantly larger than in the previously discussed houses: as large as eighteen feet, eight inches by twelve feet, two inches.

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<sup>41</sup> DOB folder 5259/8, permit NB 7582-1921.





Figure 3-24. First floor of James Boyle's 1921 three-story, two family houses on Eleventh Avenue, Windsor Terrace. One unit occupied the first two floors.



Figure 3-25. Second floor of Boyle's houses.



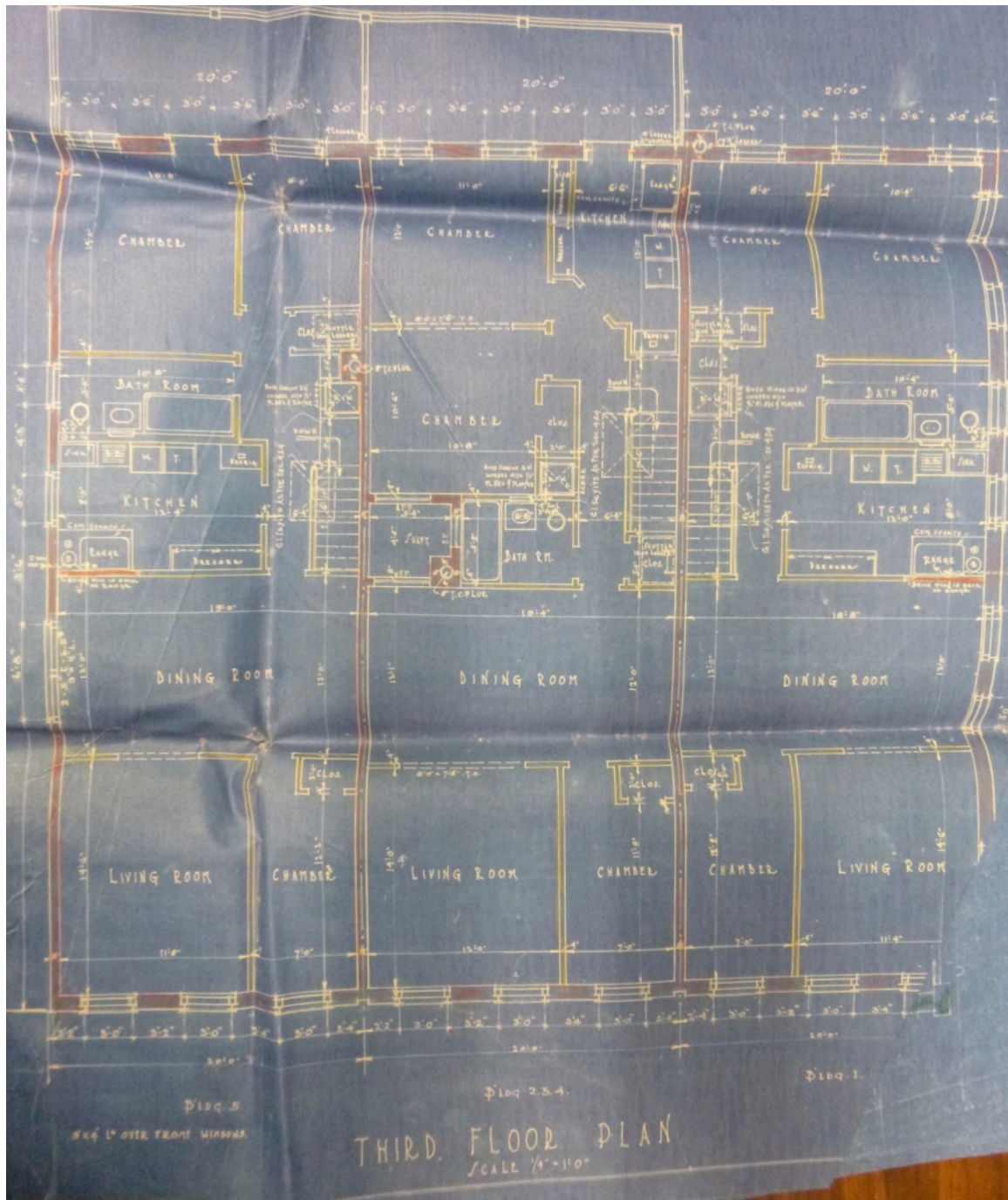


Figure 3-26. Third floor of Boyle's houses, with the one-floor second apartment.

The exteriors of these houses combine Tapestry Brickwork with stone details in a strong Colonial Revival style. Between a stone molding that runs separately above each house's third-floor windows, and below a continuous molded stone stringcourse, are



rectangular panels of patterned brick—stacked headers and basketweaves. Above is a parapet with a simple wide, flat projection.

The Prospect Park Southwest buildings were advertised in 1921 as “William M. Calder’s Newest Tax-Exempt Two-Family Houses, Facing Beautiful Prospect Park”—referring to the property tax exemption enacted in 1920—and boasting “exquisitely decorated” interiors; up-to-date electric and heat systems, as well as the Smith Street streetcar line that traveled from Fulton Ferry to Coney Island Avenue.<sup>42</sup>

As with the earlier Tapestry Brick dwellings observed in Windsor Terrace, these examples have seemingly similar counterparts elsewhere in Brooklyn, including a number of relatively grand, three-story semidetached houses on President Street in Crown Heights.

### **One- and Two-Family Homes in the 1920s**

The early 1920s saw the resumption of larger-scale speculative development in Windsor Terrace, particularly immediately to the east and south of the section largely built by Calder. In these houses, the Tapestry Brick style evolves from its eclectic roots to a more consolidated style, relying almost exclusively on ornamental brickwork and parapet shape, with small stone details, in a flat façade. Two-story buildings, for either one or two families, were built in quantity. A principal architect of Windsor Terrace’s 1920s brick houses was James A. Boyle, but the neighborhood also contains examples by some other architects who were extremely prolific across the borough of Brooklyn, such as Isaac Kallich and Edward M. Adelson.

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<sup>42</sup> Schoenebaum, 218.

*James A. Boyle and Developer Harold W. Lippman*

James A. Boyle, who designed three-story, two-family Colonial Revival rows for William M. Calder and continued to work for Calder elsewhere in Brooklyn, also designed a great number of the two-story Tapestry Brick dwellings built in Windsor Terrace in the subsequent years, primarily for two other sizable developers.

Boyle (1890-?) was an architect active primarily in Brooklyn from the early 1910s until at least the early 1940s, mostly for smaller buildings such as residences and garages, as well as a number of theaters. The son of immigrants from Scotland, he was listed in the 1910 U.S. Census, at the age of nineteen, as an “architect” with only a high school education, residing with his parents—his father was a Buildings Department inspector—and siblings on 18<sup>th</sup> Street, south of Park Slope.<sup>43</sup> His earliest project mentioned in the *Real Estate Record* dates to 1912; he was working as late as 1942, according to *New York Times* building notices, including a number of buildings for Calder in East Flatbush in 1941.<sup>44</sup>

Between 1922 and 1925, Boyle designed dozens of one- and two-family homes in Windsor Terrace—on Sherman Street, which runs parallel to Windsor Place one block to the south; Terrace Place, an east-west street at the end of the same block of Sherman Street; and Seeley Street, parallel to Terrace Place one block to the south. This

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<sup>43</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> U.S. Census, Kings County, N.Y., Enumeration District 575, sheet 5B (1910).

<sup>44</sup> *Real Estate Record* 89, no. 2300 (April 13, 1912), 776; *New York Times*, July 18, 1941, September 16, 1942. Projects by a firm called Boyle & Prowler at his same Fulton Street address in downtown Brooklyn are found in 1916-17, and also a Boyle & Kelly at the same address in 1917-18. James A. Boyle and G.I. Prowler were also reported in 1934 as having submitted plans for an unrealized 8,000-resident public housing project in Red Hook, for a 52-acre site adjacent to where the Red Hook Houses project was eventually erected in 1938.

construction reflects the continued redevelopment of the neighborhood with brick dwellings as it progressed from the northern and western section, where early Tapestry Brick houses were built in the 1910s, farther south and east.

Boyle's first two projects were for owner George Potts, who was based on President Street in Crown Heights: a row of eight attached single-family houses on Seeley Street, extending east from the corner of Prospect Avenue, and a set of four houses, identical to the Seeley Street group, directly behind them on Terrace Place (Figure 3-28).<sup>45</sup> The houses are smaller than the single-family homes built by Calder—sixteen feet wide, and thirty-two feet deep, but the extension, reaching forty-five feet, has two floors—and of an estimated construction cost of \$5,000. The first floor plan is very like the small houses built by vom Lehn on McDonald Avenue—an entrance onto a living room the width of the house, which leads, shotgun-style, to the dining room, and the kitchen in the extension. The second floor has a wide bedroom in front, bath at center, and one smaller bedroom at the rear of the main body of the building, and a third in the extension (Figure 3-27). The second floor of the extension meant that, though the houses are quite compact, the three bedrooms are in fact larger than those in the 1910s houses by Hudson and Carlson.

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<sup>45</sup> DOB folder 5256/71, permit NB 3433-1922; 5256/80, permit NB 3478-1922.



Figure 3-27. First- (left) and second-floor plans of James Boyle's single-family houses on Seeley Street (1922).



Figure 3-28. Terrace Place one-family houses, James Boyle, 1922.

The facades, in Flemish bond yellow brick, are simpler and more angular than most of their predecessors, in two alternating variations. In both, the parapet profile is a wide, shallow flat projection, forming part of the frame of a panel of decorative brick—one in a basketweave pattern, one with a diamond motif. Soldier bricks form the lintels of the windows—two second-story single windows in one design, and a triple window in the other. (The brick and parapet details of the houses do not match the submitted plans.) The party wall is marked in the façade by recessed bricks. The houses do not have covered front porches, but an open patio behind a low brick wall.

Beginning in 1923, Boyle designed a series of rows for Harry W. Lippman, a Downtown Brooklyn-based owner credited in a 1925 biographical compendium of the borough's major builders with "hundreds" of one- and two-family houses.<sup>46</sup> Lippman undertook projects in Windsor Terrace in the name of two companies of which he was president, Seeley Investors Inc. and H.L. Holding Corp. The first of these projects was a row of ten semi-detached two-family homes built by Seeley Investors on the south side of Sherman Street, between Eleventh Avenue and Terrace Place (a block bisected by a short dead-end street, Horace Court).<sup>47</sup> These houses share characteristics of Boyle's recent single-family homes — yellow brick, and a parapet with a wide, low, flat projection and a panel of basketweave-laid brick (Figure 3-30). The parapets also resemble some of the 1919 Carlson & Wiseman houses on Eleventh Avenue, in their profile and the use of

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<sup>46</sup> Leon Wexelstein, *Building Up Greater Brooklyn* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Biographical Society, 1925), 147.

<sup>47</sup> DOB folder 5256/16, permit NB 10507-1923; 5256/22, permit NB 10508-1923.

small stone medallions.<sup>48</sup> Accommodating a family on each floor, they are twenty feet wide and fifty feet deep. That depth does not include an eight-foot-deep enclosed projecting front porch on the first floor; enclosed porches, both projecting and internal, would become an occasional feature in Tapestry Brick dwellings in the 1920s.

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<sup>48</sup> The plans for the buildings depict a different parapet design — two alternating variations of a stepped profile, with brickwork panels like those seen on Boyle's recent three-story two-families.



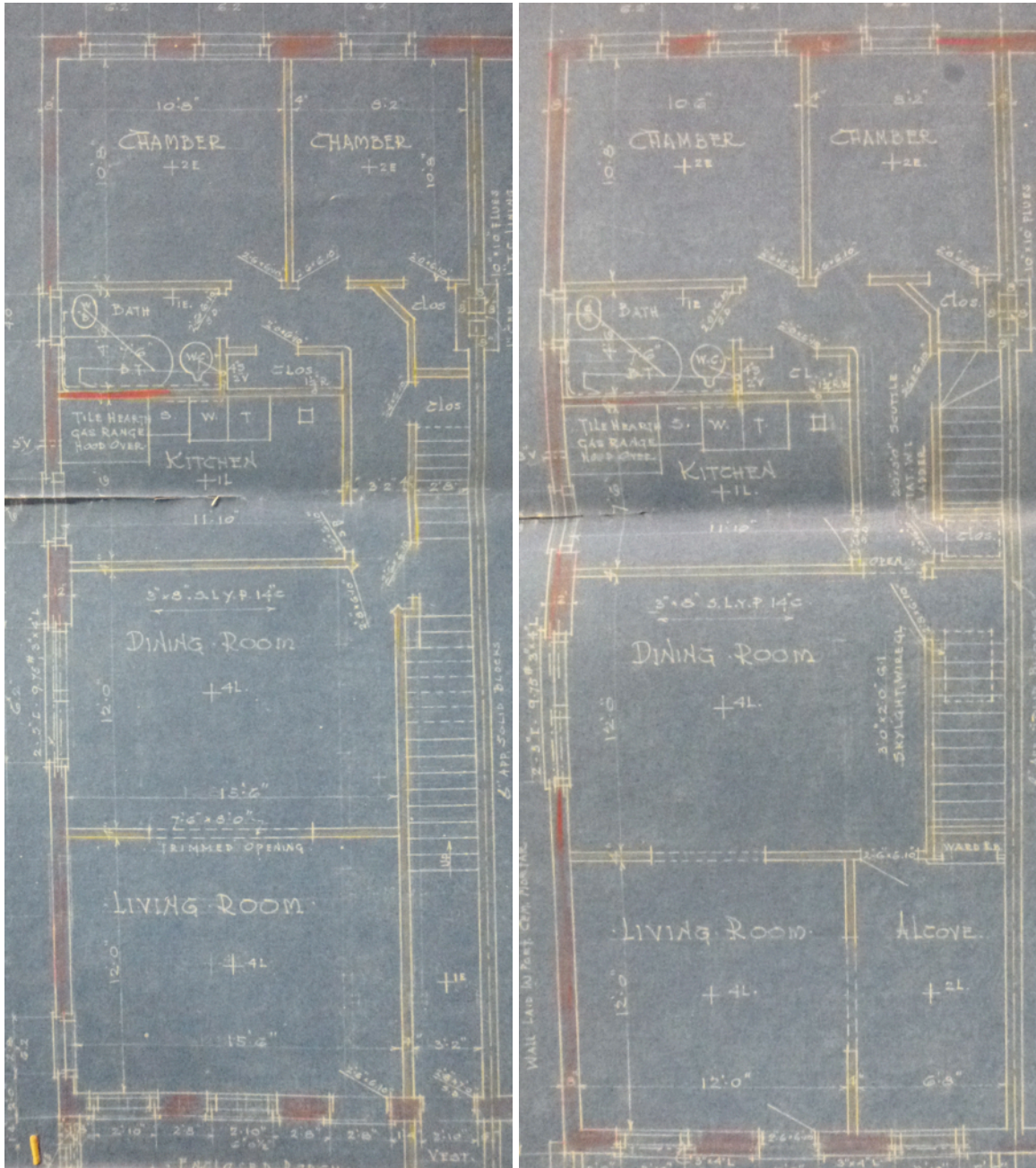


Figure 3-29. First- (left) and second-floor plans of two-family houses by James Boyle on Sherman Street (1923).



Figure 3-30. Sherman Street, James Boyle, 1923.

Notably, these two-family houses have separate, but immediately adjacent, front doors for the two units. The first floor is entered via the enclosed porch, which leads to the living room and dining room in shotgun fashion, with a small hall in the rear, off of which are arranged the kitchen, bath, and the two bedrooms (Figure 3-29). The separate front door for the second unit leads through a vestibule and hall to the stairs. From the stair landing, the apartment is entered through the dining room, with the apartment layout similar to the first floor, except for an “alcove” in the front, next to the living room over the vestibule — a common arrangement in brick dwellings with more than one unit, though this room is often labeled as an additional small “chamber” or bedroom. The roof of the enclosed porch serves as an open verandah for the second-floor unit, accessed by a door in the center of the façade.

A similar yellow brick façade and parapet appear on a 1924 row of five attached buildings designed by Boyle on Eleventh Avenue at Sherman Street that originally contained stores on the ground floor (all apparently since converted to solely residential use) — the intersection was once one of Windsor Terrace’s commercial nodes (Figure 3-31).<sup>49</sup> Four of the buildings, twenty feet by sixty feet, had small living quarters behind the store — a living room, bedroom and bath — and an apartment for one other family above, with living room and alcove in front, a large central dining room with bath adjacent, and kitchen and sole bedroom at rear.



Figure 3-31. A row of what were originally stores with apartments on 11th Avenue, Windsor Terrace (James Boyle, 1924)

A year later, Boyle designed two facing rows of houses on Seeley Street between 18<sup>th</sup> Street and Prospect Avenue for Lippman. The rows, of fifteen houses on the north side of Seeley and nine on the south side, are essentially identical to each other (filed plans put one row at 15’3” wide and the other at 15’4”), and, within a foot in each

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<sup>49</sup> DOB folder 5256/14 NB 11494-1924; *Neighborhoods of Brooklyn*, 212.



dimension, essentially match the Boyle/Potts single-family houses in plan: walled open front patio, living room and dining room and extension kitchen on the first floor, three chambers above. The unmeasured front elevation drawing filed with the plans is, in fact, the identical drawing filed with the Potts buildings. But in this case the built facades, in yellow brick, match it: parapets with broad projections alternating between flat and curved profiles, brickwork alternating between stretcher bond and one-to-five American bond, and lintels of soldier courses.

### *The Red Brick Style of the 1920s*

Among other Brooklyn architects designing both one- and two-family homes in Windsor Terrace in the 1920s were Isaac Kallich and Edward M. Adelson, both Russian-born immigrants who were prolific architects of a wide variety of buildings in Brooklyn and Queens.<sup>50</sup> Though Kallich was, by the 1920s at least, based in Downtown Brooklyn, Adelson's office was on Pitkin Avenue, the main street of the major Jewish eastern Brooklyn neighborhood of Brownsville. Their buildings in Windsor Terrace resemble the work that they, and architects of somewhat similar backgrounds, did in other neighborhoods, including Northeast Flatbush, in the 1920s: primarily of red brick, unlike the yellow brick overwhelmingly used by Boyle to date, and for two or more families occupying a deeper portion of the building lot.

Adelson built an attached pair of two-family houses (one side of one of them standing free at a corner) on Greenwood Avenue and East 7<sup>th</sup> Street, in southern Windsor

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<sup>50</sup> "Isaac Kallich" (Obituary), *New York Times*, June 25, 1962. See Chapter 4 for details on Adelson.

Terrace, for a Joseph Dubeshter of Dumont Avenue in Brownsville.<sup>51</sup> The red brick facades are busy with paneled sections in various bonds and decorative brickwork, including herringbone, geometric flat stone insets, including semicircular transoms over the doors, and triple or quadruple windows on each floor in addition to the front door and double window above (Figure 3-32). The two houses are of different width — twenty and twenty-three feet — and sixty-three feet deep, significantly deeper than previous two-story two-families in Windsor Terrace.



Figure 3-32. Greenwood Avenue, Edward M. Adelsohn, 1922.

On the first floor, they each have two bedrooms at the rear, and one has an enclosed porch carved out of the front parlor space; both have a single entrance door to a

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<sup>51</sup> DOB folder 5278/46, permit NB 3163-1922.

vestibule with doors to each unit's hall. The upstairs units are similar, with front enclosed porches in both houses, as well as the customary additional small front chamber, adjacent to a smaller parlor over the vestibule.

In 1924, Kallich designed a group of semidetached two-family houses on Terrace Place between Prospect Avenue and Sherman Street, for Boyle's client Harry W.

Lippman (Figure 3-33).<sup>52</sup> They are similar to Adelsohn's in their red Tapestry Brick façade, as well as their dimensions and plans — except that the rooms follow each other in a shotgun manner rather than along a hall, with a “breakfast room” area continuous with the kitchen; and, what in other houses was the small chamber over the vestibule is called a “music room” (Figure 3-34). On the lots just to the west — shorter due to the diagonal course of Terrace Place — Lippman and Kallich built a semidetached pair of single-family houses, sixteen feet wide and forty-five deep including a thirteen-foot extension. With facades and fenestration like scaled-down versions of their two-family neighbors, the interior plans resemble Boyle's single family dwellings.

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<sup>52</sup> DOB folder 5256/29, permit NB 4522-1924.





Figure 3-33. Two-family houses on Terrace Place, Windsor Terrace (Isaac Kallich, 1924).

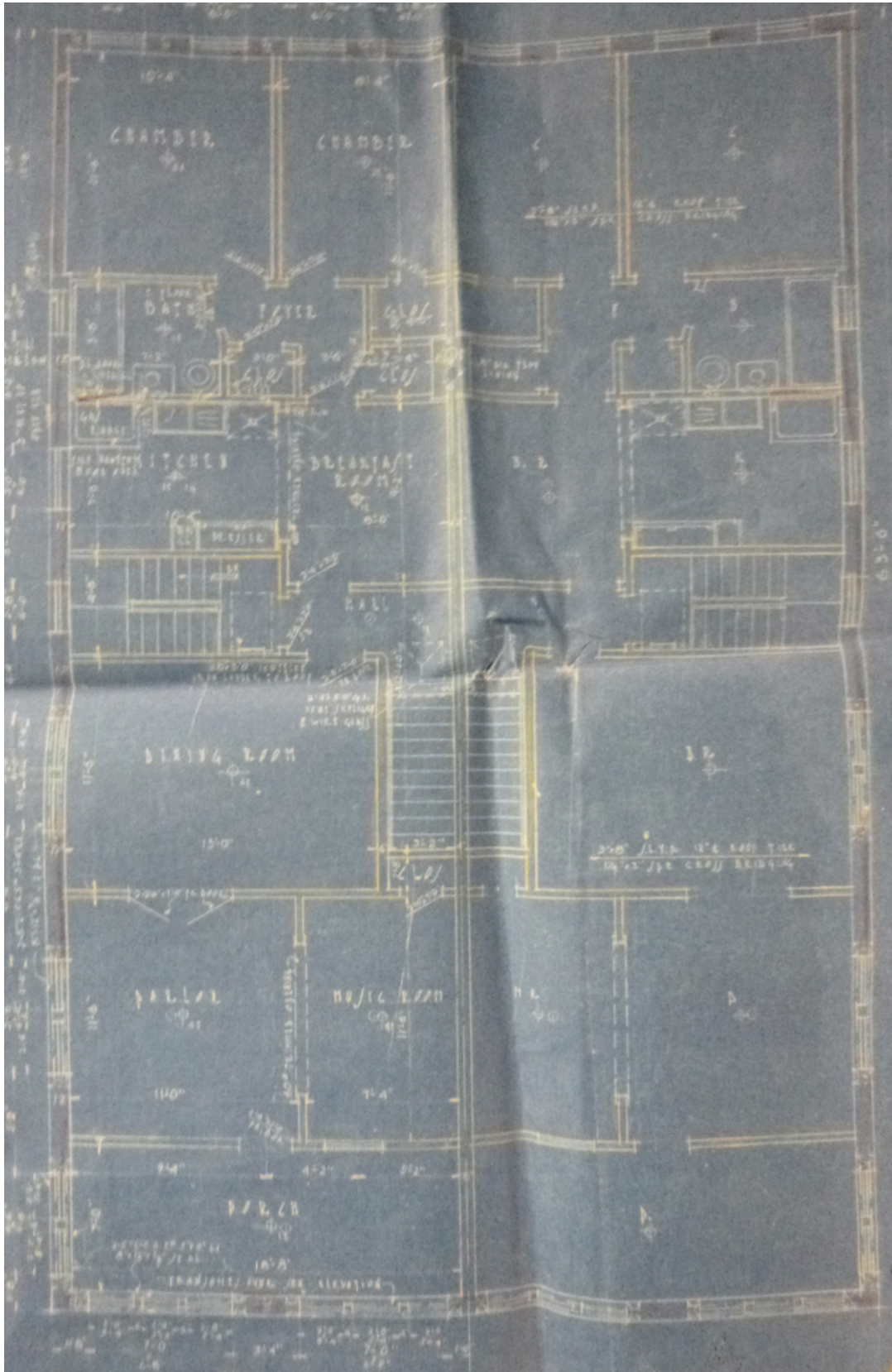


Figure 3-34. Second-floor plan of Isaac Kallich's two-family houses on Terrace Place.



The distinctive and increasingly common red brick was employed by Boyle himself in a single-building project in Windsor Terrace in 1926 (Figure 3-35). For John DeAngelis, a local owner, he designed a two-story, three-family Tapestry Brick house on East 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.<sup>53</sup> The first-floor plan of the twenty-by-sixty-foot building is similar to Kallich's and Adelson's, with the two bedrooms at the back, while the second floor holds two apartments, one in front, and one in the rear. The units are entered from the center of the floor, into a foyer leading to kitchen and bath, with a small living room and bedroom beyond, at the front or rear of the building. (Boyle had also been the architect for a previous, unrealized plan for the plot, submitted earlier in 1926, for a one-story delicatessen, also with a Tapestry Brick parapet façade.)



Figure 3-35. House by James Boyle (left) on East 2nd Street, Windsor Terrace (1926)

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<sup>53</sup> DOB folder 5271/70, permit NB 13934-1926.

The pair of small, three-room units on the second floor of this house is the same as the common arrangement in the two-story, four-family plans that would be more prevalent in a neighborhood like Northeast Flatbush. One example of just such a four-family in Windsor Terrace, on 20<sup>th</sup> Street, was designed by Anthony J. Daidone for a local owner, Joseph Dispenza (Figure 3-36).<sup>54</sup> Twenty feet wide, the building's increased depth reflects its occupancy — seventy feet. With a red-brick façade with stepped-up and peaked parapet and Colonial Revival details like a front door fan light, the house's two floors are each divided into two units of different sizes: in front, a larger one with living room, dining room, kitchen and a bedroom at the center of the building (which is attached only on one side, allowing windows on the other); and in the rear, a much smaller apartment with kitchen, “alcove,” and a small parlor and one chamber at the rear.

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<sup>54</sup> DOB folder 5265/10, permit NB 5144-1926. Daidone was later head of the New York City Department of Public Works Bureau of Architecture.



Figure 3-36. Four-family house, 20th Street, Anthony Daidone, 1926.

### *Residents of Windsor Terrace's 1920s Housing*

The 1930 U.S. Census shows that the developments in the 1920s in Windsor Terrace housed a somewhat different population from the earlier Tapestry Brick houses. The rows at 167-181 Seeley Street, and the identical ones across the street at 140-154 Seeley Street and a block away at 154-160 Terrace Place — small single-family, three-bedroom houses designed by Boyle — were more likely to have foreign-born owners,

many of whom were from Syria, but also Turkey, Ireland and Italy. They did not include white-collar professionals like lawyers, except for one English-born real estate broker, but more proprietors and skilled workers — silk cutters, mechanics, a blacksmith — and an Irish-born policeman.<sup>55</sup>

In two-family houses by Boyle on Sherman Street, the occupants — both the owners and renters — were also more often than not foreign-born, but always European, chiefly Russian. Similar occupations are found as in the nearby single-family houses, though, with a number of store owners, as well as another Irish police officer. One household, headed by an Austrian hosiery salesman, had a servant living in. Around the corner on Terrace Place, in the red brick two-family houses designed by Kallich, were similar in their owners and renters.<sup>56</sup>

However, the pair of houses in the red brick style by Adelson, and built by the Brownsville-based developer Joseph Dubeshter, are notable for having Russian-born Jewish owners, suggesting a role played by communal ties in their development, design and marketing — the same kind of ties that shaped the development of Northeast Flatbush and other second-generation Jewish neighborhoods like it.<sup>57</sup>

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Windsor Terrace was one of the neighborhoods in which the earliest Tapestry Brick dwellings were built in the early 1910s. These were attached single-family houses by architects who had also designed many of the traditional corniced row houses of

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<sup>55</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> U.S. Census, Brooklyn, N.Y., Enumeration District 635 (1930).

<sup>56</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> U.S. Census, Brooklyn, N.Y., Enumeration District 635 (1930).

<sup>57</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> U.S. Census, Brooklyn, N.Y., Enumeration District 637 (1930).



Brooklyn. These architects began designing houses instead with flat facades of brick, adorning them with brick patterns, stone insets, and shaped parapets, as part of a larger eclectic scheme incorporating, most often, Spanish tile and other Mission Revival details, but also choosing other historical influences. These single-family houses, some even constructed with servants' quarters, were designed for middle-class buyers.

The earliest two-family homes built in the area, by Calder in the immediate aftermath of World War I, were designed for a similar class of resident. Spacious and also containing servant's rooms and private garages, they arranged two-family living at a standard comparable to their single-family predecessors.

As the 1920s progressed, the construction of two-story brick residences resumed apace, amid the borough-wide building boom. As demand for outer-borough housing increased and broadened, the prospect of subway service also increased the desirability of areas of Windsor Terrace farther from the park. More modest two-story dwellings were built, mostly single-family and two-family houses but occasionally three- or four-family tenements, still with brick facades — but ornamented in a somewhat simpler fashion, characterized entirely by their flat, patterned facades and parapets. This kind of Tapestry Brick was the norm in Northeast Flatbush, a neighborhood developed entirely in the 1920s.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Case Study: The Neighborhood Of Northeast Flatbush, Brooklyn**

In Windsor Terrace, brick dwellings evolved from the corniced, Classically-inspired styles of the late nineteenth century into the Tapestry Brick style characterized by a flat façade of patterned brick, with a shaped, corniceless parapet, in the 1910s and 1920s. The evolution of this style was accompanied by a shift from single-family homes to houses for two families and occasionally more, as more of the neighborhood was redeveloped in response to the intense demand for housing in the 1920s, and as a more working-class populace moved into the area.

Northeast Flatbush was newly developed in the early to mid-1920s, in the midst of the housing boom. Here, an already matured Tapestry Brick style was the norm in the development of houses mainly for two or four families. Northeast Flatbush is immediately to the west of Brownsville, which in the early twentieth century was a densely populated Jewish neighborhood. As Brownsville became more congested and working-class in character, the broader area of East Flatbush to the west, as well as the area around Eastern Parkway to the north, were developed in the 1920s with two-family homes and apartment buildings largely populated by middle-class and more-prosperous

working-class Jews. Those who were even more prosperous might move to single-family homes in Flatbush proper or Borough Park.<sup>1</sup>

However, the history — and architecture — of Northeast Flatbush tell a somewhat more complex story than the simple dichotomy of working-class Brownsville and its middle-class offshoots. While Northeast Flatbush was clearly distinguished from Brownsville by the acknowledged border of East 98<sup>th</sup> Street and its streetscape of two-story semidetached homes, it was the closest of its “satellite” Jewish neighborhoods. Its original inhabitants — both owners and renters — were in fact a mixture of small business owners, skilled workers, and white-collar workers. They lived in homes that externally reflected the ideal of the house-lined street, but some of which were literally tenements, with much denser occupancy than might be suggested by their facades.

### **Location and Orientation**

Northeast Flatbush is part of Brooklyn’s geographically large East Flatbush section. It is bounded on the northwest by East New York Avenue; to the southwest, by Remsen Avenue; to the northeast, by East 98<sup>th</sup> Street, and, to the southeast, roughly by Church Avenue (Figure 4-1). “Northeast Flatbush” is not necessarily a commonly used name for the area, but this term, which is used by the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP), is adopted here for geographic and historical clarity. While in practice this area is sometimes referred to as “Remsen Village,” DCP uses that name specifically

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Dash Moore, “On the Fringes of the City: Jewish Neighborhoods in Three Boroughs,” in David Ward and Oliver Zunz, eds., *The Landscape of Modernity: Essays on New York City, 1900-1940* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1992), 257-258.

for the adjacent section to the southeast, also between Remsen and East 98<sup>th</sup> Streets.<sup>2</sup> The name Remsen Village appears to have arisen in connection with the later development of that area, which extends south of Church Avenue as far as a railroad line that sharply separates Remsen Village from Canarsie.

Together, Northeast Flatbush and Remsen Village form a rectangular grid that is separate and differently oriented from the surrounding street grids: the rest of East Flatbush to the west across Remsen Avenue, Brownsville to the east beyond East 98<sup>th</sup> Street, and Crown Heights beyond East New York Avenue to the northwest. Running parallel to East 98<sup>th</sup> within Northeast Flatbush is also a broad thoroughfare, Rockaway Parkway. During the 1920s, two other major boulevards — Kings Highway, cutting across the neighborhood diagonally, and Linden Boulevard, intersecting with Kings Highway at the southwest corner of Northeast Flatbush — were also improved and widened.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Brooklyn Community District 17 profile, Department of City planning website, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bk17profile.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> “Brooklyn’s Needs Outlined by Guider,” *New York Times*, Jan. 2, 1926.



Figure 4-1. Northeast Flatbush. The pairs of narrow buildings that predominate on the numbered streets are semidetached two- and four-family houses.



Like Windsor Terrace, Northeast Flatbush is composed mostly of two-story residential buildings, with a few larger apartment buildings, and served by commercial strips composed mostly of low-rise storefronts with one or two residential stories above them. However, while Windsor Terrace was a previously settled area that was developed densely with brick houses over decades, Northeast Flatbush was almost entirely open land until it was developed rapidly in the mid-1920s — mostly 1922-1926. It therefore has a more uniform character, its numbered streets lined with red-brick semidetached houses that are mostly either two- or four-family dwellings (Figure 4-2). The facades of the two- and four-family houses are hardly distinguishable from each other, being typically of identical width and with similar details, but the four-family houses have substantially greater depth.



Figure 14-2. East 95th Street, looking north from Winthrop Street.



Northeast Flatbush shares these characteristics with other neighborhoods in Brooklyn, such as much of Bensonhurst and Mapleton. It was chosen as a study area because it is a geographically well defined area that is almost completely and uniformly occupied by Tapestry Brick dwellings of a certain kind and period. This streetscape remains largely unchanged some ninety years after these houses were built, despite enormous social changes in the neighborhood, which now has a mostly black population of Caribbean descent.

For this study, twenty-two sets of houses were researched, ranging from four to twenty buildings each, representing at least some part of roughly twenty percent of the residential block fronts along the numbered streets. Groups of buildings were initially chosen from a visual survey as samples that would represent different areas of the neighborhood, and be representative of the variety of designs found in Northeast Flatbush. From those surveyed, the final set of buildings addressed in this study were determined by availability of Department of Buildings records.

## **Neighborhood History**

### *Early Speculation in a “New Brownsville”*

The site of Northeast Flatbush was viewed as a potential adjunct to Brownsville long before it actually came to be developed. Brownsville was originally named after Charles S. Brown, a developer who in 1865 first built modest frame houses in the area intended to attract working-class residents. However, it was a tenement development begun in 1887 by Aaron Kaplan, followed by the establishment of a number of garment

factories, that spurred urban, predominantly Jewish settlement in Brownsville.<sup>4</sup> Major growth was made possible by the Fulton Street elevated service, beginning in 1889, and the 1903 opening of the Williamsburg Bridge connecting Brooklyn to the Lower East Side. By 1910, Brownsville itself was characterized by “large multifamily buildings where life had come to resemble the Lower East Side, including the crowding that so many people had tried to escape.”<sup>5</sup>

In January 1904, a “Big Deal in Brownsville” was reported in the *New York Times*, in which “[t]he last of the farms bordering on the old city of Brooklyn, immediately joining Brownsville, have been sold in the past week.”<sup>6</sup> The eighty-two-acre property, including tracts of the Vanderveer, Ryerson, Tapscott, Schenck and Van Siclen farms, was acquired by a syndicate that planned to divide it into six thousand building lots to be “sold in small parcels to the Jewish population, which has been emigrating from the east side of Manhattan” to Brownsville.<sup>7</sup> The *Times* further commented two weeks later that there was “a very great difference of opinion as to the future of the present unimproved properties adjoining Brownsville on all sides” — what it referred to as the “New Brownsville movement.” The syndicate predicted that a “boom” would begin in the area “as soon as the snow is off the ground,” while a major owner of property in Brownsville proper dismissed the flatlands to the west as “so low that it is impossible to install a sewerage system.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Moore, 256-257; Schoenebaum, 104.

<sup>5</sup> Snyder-Grenier, 101.

<sup>6</sup> “In the Real Estate Field: Big Deal in Brownsville,” *New York Times*, Jan. 3, 1904; also see *Real Estate Record* 73, no. 1868 (Jan. 9, 1904), 54-55.

<sup>7</sup> “Big Deal in Brownsville.”

<sup>8</sup> “Brownsville’s Big Boom,” *New York Times*, Jan. 17, 1904.

In fact, Northeast Flatbush remained undeveloped for another two decades. In the meantime, it was considered as part of a possible route for a southeastern extension of Eastern Parkway, which would have proceeded “along the block between East 98<sup>th</sup> Street and Rockaway Parkway” and turned east at Newport Avenue (now Willmohr Street) — a plan that did not come to fruition.<sup>9</sup> The 1920 Belcher Hyde atlas of Brooklyn shows the zone almost entirely vacant, except for frame buildings lining two narrow streets extending a short ways south of East New York Avenue, at cross angles to the envisioned but unopened street grid, and a smattering of a few other frame houses across the area.<sup>10</sup>

### *Transit Advances*

By the 1910s, atlases indicate that there was some trolley service to Brownsville that traveled along East 98<sup>th</sup> Street, on the eastern edge of Northeast Flatbush. The Dual Contracts of 1913 provided for an extension of the IRT Eastern Parkway subway line that would proceed along East 98<sup>th</sup> Street before turning east into Brownsville and terminating at New Lots Avenue in East New York. Two of this line’s stations served Northeast Flatbush: Sutter Avenue–Rutland Road, on East 98<sup>th</sup> Street a block south of East New York Avenue, and another just east of East 98<sup>th</sup> Street, at Saratoga and Livonia Avenues. Service to these stops, and three further ones, began in late 1920, and the remaining two stops in East New York came into service in 1922.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Plans to Extend Eastern Parkway,” *Real Estate Record* 89, no. 2301 (April 20, 1912), 790.

<sup>10</sup> *Atlas of the Borough of Brooklyn, City of New York*, vol. 1 (Brooklyn: E. Belcher Hyde, 1920-22).

<sup>11</sup> “I.R.T. to Open New Line,” *New York Times*, Nov. 21, 1920; “Increased Subway Service Tomorrow,” *New York Times*, Oct. 15, 1922.

### *Land Purchased for Home Construction*

It was at just this time that development of Northeast Flatbush began. Of the twenty-two rows of houses researched in the neighborhood, the earliest building plan filed was in 1922. A series of reported real estate transactions in the 1920s provide some outline of the process of development in Northeast Flatbush. Many of them involved a property owner named S.G. Nissenson, operating as president of the Sagenis Realty Corp.<sup>12</sup> Between 1923 and 1925, Nissenson bought large sections of Northeast Flatbush, most often from an entity called Rutland Road Realty Co. Inc., and sold tracts to various builders, with requirements that they build a certain number of two- or four-family homes. The building requirements, and a report of Nissenson buying a set of houses from one of the same builders in Borough Park, seem to indicate that, in some cases at least, he sold plots to the builders and then repurchased them with the improvements made.<sup>13</sup> Many of the frontages were sold to the same builders, including the Brownsville-based Alex Graifer, the Downtown Brooklyn-based Enforth Building Corp. and RK&R Building Co. of the Eastern Parkway district.<sup>14</sup> Most of the developers recorded in building plans filed for the houses of Northeast Flatbush appear to be Jewish builders based in Eastern Brooklyn or occasionally Downtown.

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<sup>12</sup> The name Sagenis suggests that Nissenson was likely Samuel George Nissenson, a lawyer and author of two studies of early New York landownership: *The Patroon's Domain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937) and "The Development of a Land Registration System in New York," *New York History* 20, no. 1 (January 1939), 16-42, and 2 (April 1939), 161-188.

<sup>13</sup> "Activity in 38<sup>th</sup> St.," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 13, 1924.

<sup>14</sup> "New Interests Take Over Brooklyn Project," *The Sun and the Globe*, Dec. 6, 1923; "Four-Family Houses for Brooklyn," *New York Times*, Dec. 7, 1923; "Trading in Brooklyn," *New York Times*, Feb. 20, 1924; "Operator Buys Large Plottage in Brooklyn," *The Sun*, May 26, 1925; "Brooklyn Plots Sold," *New York Times*, May 27, 1925; "'New' Brownsville Deal Involves \$300,000," *Brooklyn Standard Union*, May 27, 1925; and "Rutland Road Block Deal," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Aug. 6, 1925.

The plans for the researched buildings were filed between 1922 and 1926, mostly in 1925-26. Records of the New York State Census of 1925 show the area to be populated by that year. Photographs of the area from as late as 1925 still depict old farmhouses amid the unpaved streets and rows of new brick houses (Figure 4-3).



Figure 4-3. Detail of a 1925 photograph showing new brick houses on Rockaway Parkway south of Newport Street, with the house of Derick Remsen in the background. (Eugene L. Armbruster/New York Public Library)

By the end of the 1920s, the Northeast Flatbush area was almost completely developed, as illustrated in the 1929 Belcher Hyde Brooklyn atlas.<sup>15</sup> The adjacent area south of Church Avenue was only sporadically built toward the east, and almost entirely vacant in the west. Tapestry Brick dwellings for two and four families make up the vast majority of the street frontage, but they were not the only kind of building erected. A

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<sup>15</sup> *Desk Atlas of the Borough of Brooklyn, City of New York*, vol. 3 (Brooklyn: E. Belcher Hyde, 1929), plates 207-214.



number of larger three or more story tenements were also built, often on the corners of blocks and along the broad Rockaway Parkway, often designed by the same architects in a congruent style of brick ornamentation (Figure 4-4). Some sections of the east-west named streets — particularly Rutland Road — are fronted by rows of shops with one (less often, two) stories of apartments above — again, developed and designed by the same builders and architects at the same time. The eastern edge of the neighborhood — the west side of East 98<sup>th</sup> Street, much of it under the elevated IRT line — was lined with garages by 1929, and remains one-story commercial space today.



**Figure 4-4. Apartment buildings and Tapestry Brick houses at Lenox Road and East 96th Street.**

Because Northeast Flatbush was developed in a short period, during which the architectural conventions and the range of plans appear to have been relatively fixed, the following section will examine samples of this residential development not chronologically, but by focusing on key aspects of it: the group of architects who

designed them; the ornamental aesthetic they share; the plans of the two- and four-family houses, respectively; and the occupants of the houses as recorded in the Census.

## **Architects**

The twenty-two sets of houses researched in Northeast Flatbush were designed by eight different architects: S. Millman & Son (eight); Kavy & Kavovitt (three); Edward M. Adelson (three); Adolph Goldberg (two); Irving Kirshenblitt (two); and Jack Fein, M.A. Cantor, Morris Rothstein and William A. Lacerenza with one row each.

Richard Plunz, in his history of New York City housing, notes that the construction boom of the 1920s was marked by the emergence of “a new generation of architects who were assimilated into the profession.” In contrast to the preceding “stereotypical gentlemen” architects drawn from the upper middle class, these architects were often “first- or second-generation immigrants” who, if they trained formally, did so at “nonelite local schools like Cooper Union, Pratt Institute or New York University.” This generation included some who became famous, such as Emery Roth, but most “practiced silently in their respective boroughs where they lived and where most of the new housing work was.”<sup>16</sup>

The architects of Northeast Flatbush bear out this account vividly. All of those whose birthplace is known were foreign-born, mostly Russian or Eastern European Jews — one was an immigrant from Italy. All were based in Brooklyn, and many, but not all, were based in Brownsville. If they were not based in Brownsville, they worked out of Downtown Brooklyn — and many of the Brownsville architects would later relocate to

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<sup>16</sup> Plunz, 124.

Downtown. Although they continued to work primarily in Brooklyn, and in some cases in other outer boroughs, some became well known as prolific architects of larger apartment buildings and other projects.

*S. Millman & Son/Peter Millman*

The Brownsville-based firm of S. Millman & Son, represented by Peter Millman, was the designer of the largest number of houses researched in Northeast Flatbush. The practice, founded by Peter Millman's father Samuel, was prolific in many parts of Brooklyn, according to numerous building notices in the *Real Estate Record*.<sup>17</sup> Samuel Millman and his wife and children were Russian-born Jews who immigrated to the United States in the early years of the twentieth century, according to Census records.<sup>18</sup> Peter, who was born about 1886, and his older brother James J. Millman were both architects. James J. Millman, after working in his father's firm, went on to work on his own, based in Downtown Brooklyn, while Peter Millman, at least in the 1920s, remained with the firm of S. Millman & Son.<sup>19</sup> Listings in the *Real Estate Record* indicate that this firm, after being based in Brownsville at 1780 Pitkin Avenue in the 1910s, operated in 1919-1920 from 26 Court Street, a Downtown address shared by numerous architects and

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<sup>17</sup> More than 1,000 mentions in the searchable database of the magazine extending to 1922.

<sup>18</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> U.S. Census, Brooklyn Ward 24, Enumeration District 644, Sheet 17A (1910); 14th U.S. Census, Brooklyn Assembly District 18, Enumeration District 1136, sheets 25A-B (1920).

<sup>19</sup> LPC, "Fiske Terrace–Midwood Park Historic District" designation report (2008), 50; five apartment buildings by James J. Millman in Brooklyn and Queens are represented in the New York Real Estate Brochure Collection at Columbia University's Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library.

developers — later including Peter Millman — before returning to the Pitkin Avenue address.

### *Edward M. Adelson*

The Russian-born Edward M. Adelson was the designer of a number of larger apartment buildings in Brooklyn and in Jackson Heights, Queens, as well as hospital buildings and synagogues, in addition to Tapestry Brick houses.<sup>20</sup> He was born about 1890, and was trained at Cooper Union. His office was based on Stone Avenue in Brownsville in the 1920s when he was designing houses in Northeast Flatbush, though at the time of his death in 1930, at the age of forty, he was based at 26 Court Street, and resided in Crown Heights.<sup>21</sup> A 1915 article in the *Real Estate Record* featured designs by Adelson — then about 25 — for the Brownsville and East New York Hospital, as well as a commercial block of stores with apartments above in Sheepshead Bay. Among the many synagogues he designed was Temple Petach Tikvah on Lincoln Place and Rochester Avenue, a prominent institution for the Jews of Eastern Parkway and East Flatbush.<sup>22</sup>

### *Kavy & Kavovitt*

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<sup>20</sup> 1925 New York State Census, Brooklyn, Election District 40, Assembly District 18, page 1; LPC, “Jackson Heights Historic District” designation report (2003), 33, 99, 102, 105, 109.

<sup>21</sup> “Edward M. Adelson” (obituary), *New York Times*, May 4, 1930.

<sup>22</sup> *Real Estate Record* 95, no. 2452 (March 14, 1915), 437 and 96, no. 2472 (July 31, 1915), 205; Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago: U. of Chicago, 2002); and Alter F. Landesman, *Brownsville: The Birth, Development and Passing of a Jewish Community in New York* (New York: Bloch Publishing: 1971), 309.

The firm of Kavy & Kavovitt was based at the same Stone Avenue address as Edward M. Adelsohn in the 1920s; by the 1930s it had moved to Downtown Brooklyn.<sup>23</sup> The firm, composed of the Russian-born Morris Kavy (1898-1984) and Morris Kavovitt, later designed many apartment buildings in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Long Island.<sup>24</sup>

### *Adolph Goldberg*

Architect Adolph Goldberg was born in Poland in about 1897.<sup>25</sup> Based on Montague Street in Downtown Brooklyn in the 1920s, when he was designing Tapestry Brick houses in Northeast Flatbush, he later was an architect for Brooklyn public housing projects including the Louis Heaton Pink Houses in East New York, the Glenwood Houses in Flatlands and the Marcy Houses in Williamsburg. He served as president of the Brooklyn chapter of the American Institute of Architects and of the New York State Association of Architects.<sup>26</sup>

### *Morris Rothstein*

Morris Rothstein (place and date of birth unknown) was based at 26 Court Street in 1924-25, when he designed Tapestry Brick dwellings in Northeast Flatbush. The firm

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<sup>23</sup> As recorded in Manhattan DOB permit NB 122-1934, 58-72 Avenue A, Manhattan.

<sup>24</sup> 194 buildings by Kavy & Kavovitt are represented in the Columbia New York Real Estate Brochure Collection; Jackson Heights designation report, 91, 110, 163; LPC, Upper East Side designation report (1981), vol. 2, 1274; 15<sup>th</sup> U.S. Census, Brooklyn, N.Y., Enumeration District 773, sheet 19B (1930).

<sup>25</sup> 1915 New York State Census, Election District 12, Assembly District 1, page 26.

<sup>26</sup> “Adolph Goldberg, 79, Dead; Architect for City Projects,” *New York Times*, April 24, 1976. The architect Adolph Goldberg appears to be conflated with a prominent Brooklyn developer of the same name (c. 1876-1952) in LPC, “Crown Heights North Historic District” designation report (2007), 46.



Morris Rothstein & Son designed dozens of larger apartment buildings in Brooklyn and Queens, as well as “the 2,000 semi-attached and free-standing homes that were constructed in Seaview Village in Canarsie, Brooklyn, a planned community that opened its first section in April 1955.”<sup>27</sup>

### *Other Architects*

Irving Kirshenblitt was also born in Poland, in about 1893.<sup>28</sup> Based in Brownsville, Kirshenblitt designed a number of residential projects and other relatively small building projects in the 1920s through the 1940s.<sup>29</sup>

Jack Fein was born in Russia in about 1892. He designed numerous residences and other small buildings in Brooklyn from the 1920s through the 1950s, including the small East New York synagogue Dorshe Tov Anshei (1922) in a Tapestry Brick style.<sup>30</sup>

Maxwell A. Cantor was born in Russia in about 1893.<sup>31</sup> After working in Manhattan in the early 1910s, he moved his practice to Brooklyn in 1915, and worked there for some four decades. Among his known works are a number of small commercial buildings from the 1920s in Jackson Heights, and a three-story apartment building in a Federal-inflected Tapestry Brick style in Park Slope.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ninety-four projects by the firm Morris Rothstein & Son are represented in the Columbia New York Real Estate Brochures Collection; “Jackson Heights” designation report 90, 119; LPC, “Crown Heights North II Historic District” designation report (2011), 528.

<sup>28</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> U.S. Census, Brooklyn, N.Y., Enumeration District 507, sheet 7B (1930).

<sup>29</sup> *Real Estate Record* 109, no. 8 (Feb. 25, 1922); “Alterations,” *New York Times*, Oct. 24, 1945.

<sup>30</sup> *Real Estate Record* 110, no. 15 (Oct. 7, 1922), 474; Levitt, 117, 178.

<sup>31</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> U.S. Census, Brooklyn, N.Y., Enumeration District 1642, sheet 11A (1930).

<sup>32</sup> Jackson Heights designation report 113, 116, 165; Park Slope designation report, 132.

William A. Lacerenza was also an immigrant architect, born not in Eastern Europe, however, but in Italy, in 1894.<sup>33</sup> Among the freestanding houses he designed in Flatbush neighborhoods are a set of homes combining “neo-Georgian and Spanish Mission styles” in their brickwork and tile roofs in Prospect Lefferts Gardens.<sup>34</sup> Lacerenza’s work in Northeast Flatbush and elsewhere indicates that the Tapestry Brick dwelling, while seemingly characteristic of the Brooklyn community of Jewish immigrant architects, was not *particular* to it. Italians were, of course, another principal immigrant group in New York City, and one that also saw migration from lower Manhattan neighborhoods to various parts of Brooklyn, including other areas of East Flatbush, Bensonhurst, Bath Beach and Canarsie. Examples of Tapestry Brick architecture by other Italian-born architects, such as Angelo Adamo and Dominick Salvati, suggest that the same style played a role in this burgeoning Brooklyn immigrant community parallel to its role in a Jewish neighborhood like Northeast Flatbush.

## **Ornament**

The Tapestry Brick houses of Northeast Flatbush share a common fundamental aesthetic much more than those of Windsor Terrace do — an aesthetic they share with many other Tapestry Brick houses found across Brooklyn, including elsewhere in East Flatbush and parts of Flatbush, Crown Heights, Bensonhurst, Kensington, and southern Windsor Terrace itself. Even so, this identifiable common look, characterized by particularly dense and rich brick patterns and pronounced parapet shapes, lends itself in its intricacy to seemingly infinite variation.

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<sup>33</sup> 15th U.S. Census, Brooklyn, N.Y., Enumeration District 24-458, sheet 6A (1930).

<sup>34</sup> Prospect Lefferts Gardens Historic District designation report, 38.

### *Bricks and Patterns*

Northeast Flatbush's homes are uniformly of red brick, often with patterns achieved through the use of multiple shades of red, as well as small amounts of black brick. Frequently, two shades of brick are used in a Flemish bond, to create a vibrantly patterned field, as in the 1924 four-family houses by S. Millman & Son on East 95<sup>th</sup> Street (Figure 4-5), in which black bricks also form the window surrounds, decorative vertical lines and other trim in the parapet, and courses of the arch that connects houses over the driveways. In a row of Millman two-family houses on Willmohr Street, also from 1925, the main field of brick is entirely red, with black bricks emphasizing the window and door surrounds and the decorative courses and unusual openings in the parapet (Figure 4-6).



Figure 4-5. Houses by S. Millman & Son (Peter Millman) on East 95<sup>th</sup> Street, 1924.



Figure 4-6. Houses on Willmohr St. by Millman, 1925.

In the houses by Edward M. Adelson, two different shades of brick are used instead. In a row on East 95<sup>th</sup> Street, a bold diapering pattern on the second floor, above a Flemish bond first floor, combined with a decorative panel in the parapet, make for an embroidered effect, made even more complex by double-coursed arches over the windows and numerous stone insets (Figure 4-7). Another Adelson row in two reds, on East 93<sup>rd</sup> street, with its emphasis on horizontal decorative courses and a modestly indented parapet, is understated by comparison (Figure 4-8). The houses in this row, and its identical counterpart across the street, have three stone flower-box brackets under each window — none seen bearing a flower box today. Decorative stone insets are present in



many Northeast Flatbush houses, but there are many examples in which elaborate brickwork alone constitutes the façade ornamentation.



Figure 4-7. Three-family houses on East 95th Street by Edward M. Adelson (1925).



Figure 4-8. Two-family houses by Adelsohn on East 93rd Street.

The sense of richness of these houses' brickwork resulting from the use of color contrast and bold patterns is often intensified by giving the patterns a third dimension by laying the courses of brick that frame various decorative panels to protrude slightly, as seen in a group of houses by Irving Kirshenblitt on Willmohr Street (Figure 4-9). A further sense of depth — and of privacy — is achieved in a number of houses by deeply recessing the front door behind an arched opening (Figure 4-6).



Figure 4-9. Houses on Willmohr Street by Irving Kirshenblitt.

### *Parapets*

As is characteristic of Tapestry Brick dwellings, parapet profiles are used to lend additional variety to the rows of similarly scaled homes. Variations, seen in the preceding illustrations, include different combinations of horizontal steps, crenellations, pediments and semicircles. A central, curved peak is perhaps one of the more frequent features, marking the persistence of the original Mission Revival influence on Tapestry Brick, and echoing the arched or curved patterns of brick seen in the window and door surrounds. In a given row of houses developed together in Northeast Flatbush, the parapets are more likely to be identical than to have alternating patterns, as often seen in Windsor Terrace, perhaps an economical concession; the facades are also more likely to conform to filed plans than the houses of Windsor Terrace.

Ornamental brick features also typically extend beyond the walls of the house, to encompass a low-walled front terrace at either street level or at the slightly raised first floor, as well as, frequently, a brick arch that spans the driveway between pairs of houses, tenuously attaching them.

## **The Plans of Two- and Four-Family Tapestry Brick**

### *Two-Family Houses*

Of the twenty-two groups of semidetached houses researched in Northeast Flatbush, eleven were built as two-family houses, with one dwelling unit on each floor. All of these were built on lots of twenty-five feet by one hundred feet, and have a width of just over twenty feet (most measuring twenty feet, six inches). Their depths vary from fifty-six feet to sixty-seven feet.

Among the two-family houses, the typical ground floor apartment had two bedrooms, usually situated side-by-side in the rear of the apartment (Figure 4-10). The upstairs apartment would typically use the additional space over the vestibule as an additional bedroom, though in one instance, designed in 1922 by Adolph Goldberg, this space is labeled a “Music Room.”<sup>35</sup> Some buildings would have only one labeled bedroom on the first floor, placing another living room like a “sun parlor” to the front of the apartment in addition to the parlor, as in a 1924 example on East 94<sup>th</sup> Street by Irving Kirshenblitt (Figure 4-11).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> DOB folder 4614/14, permit NB 14581.

<sup>36</sup> DOB folder 4613/59 permit NB 15726.



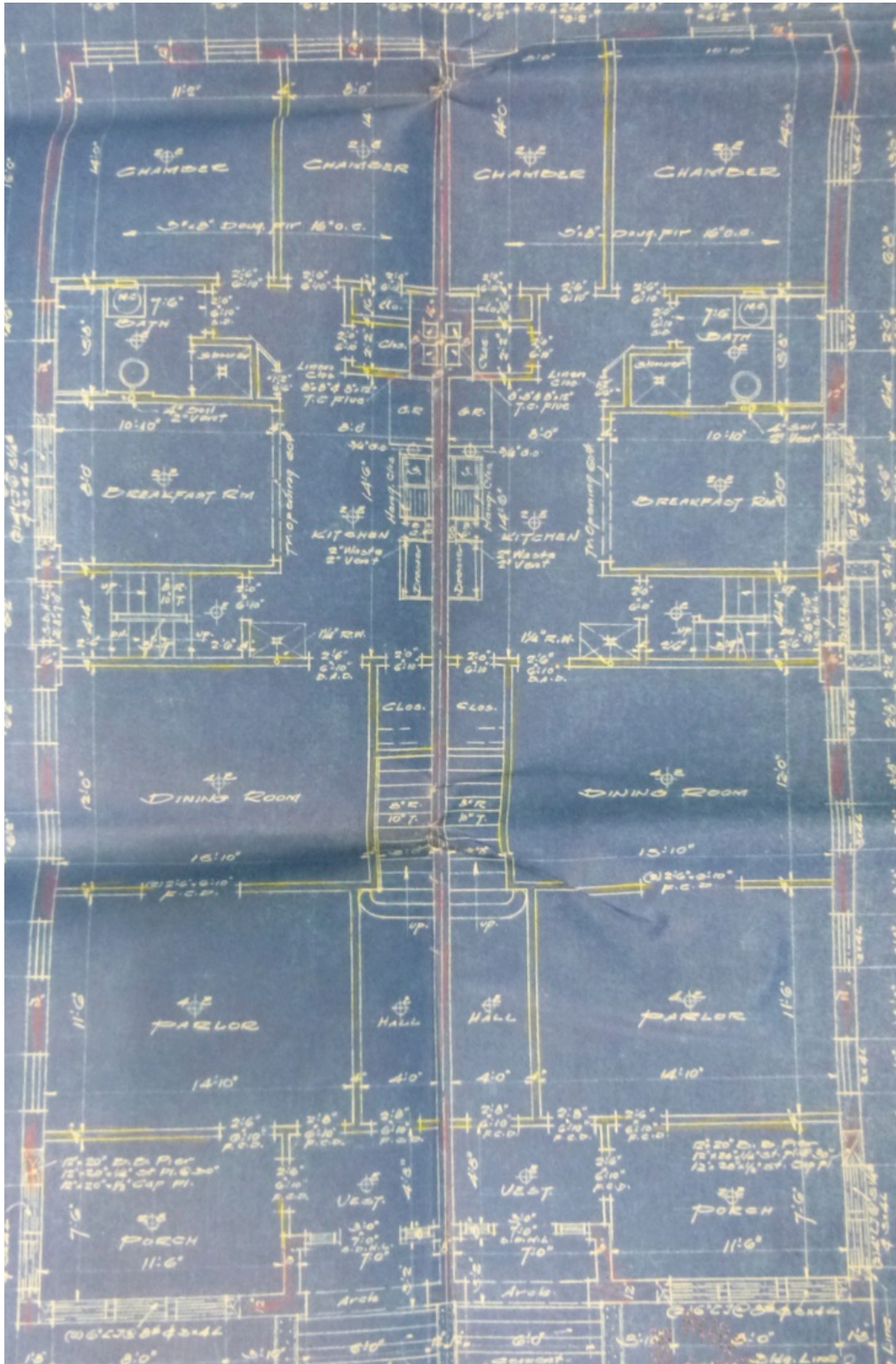


Figure 4-10. First floor of two-family houses on Willmohr Street by S. Millman & Son (1925) with enclosed porches, and pair of bedrooms at rear (exterior seen in Figure 4-6).

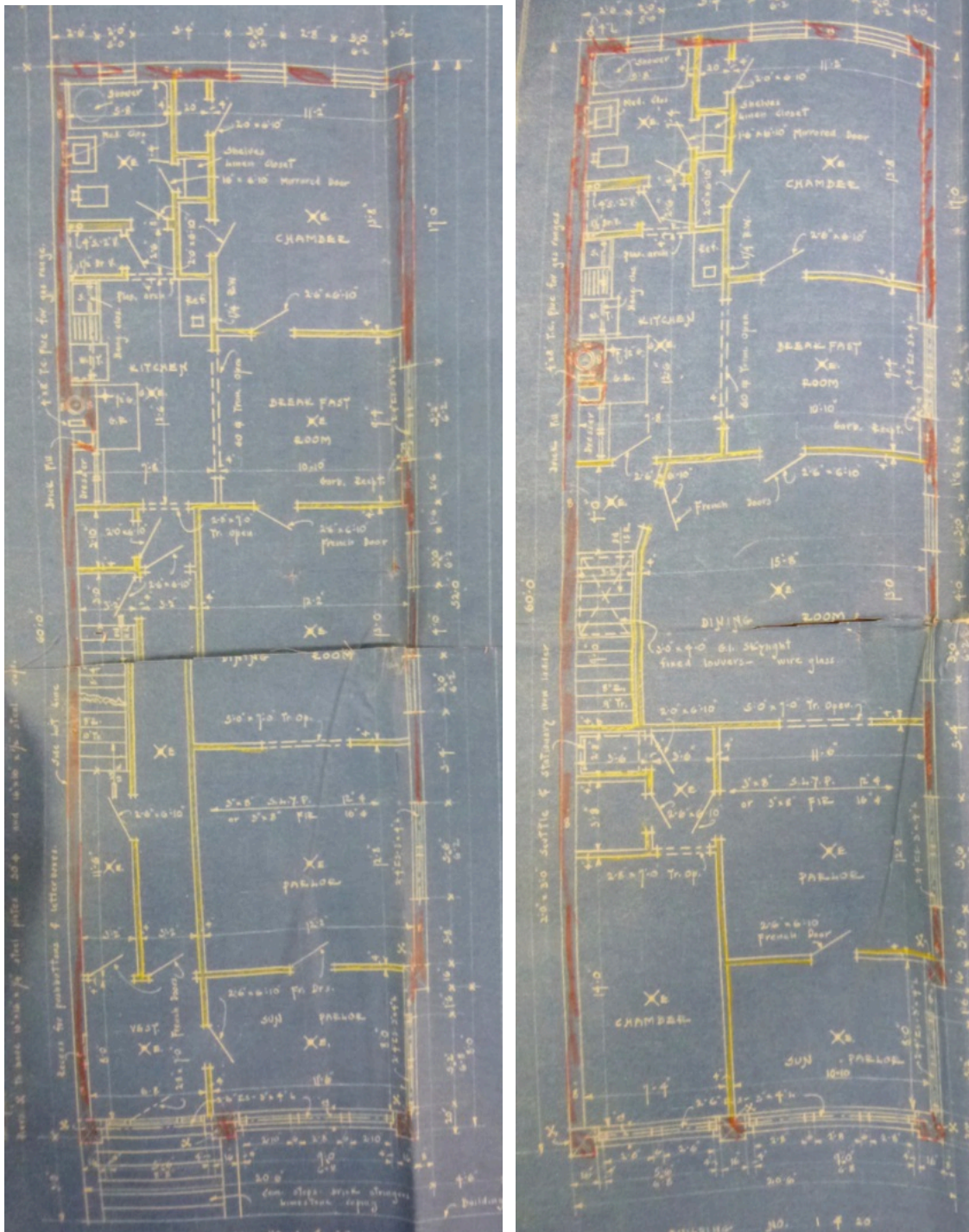






Figure 15-12. The Kirshenblitt houses seen in plan in Figure 4-11.

These two-family houses have a single external front door — trading the privacy offered by the separate entries advertised as an amenity in some two-family developments for the external resemblance to a single-family home.<sup>37</sup> In most examples, this door led to a vestibule — often marked on plans as having a tile floor — with side-by-side doors for each unit: one opening either onto a first-floor hall or directly into one of the rooms of the ground-floor apartment. The ordinary succession of rooms from front to rear of the building on the ground floor would be parlor or living room, dining room, kitchen, with bedrooms and bath arranged in the rear. The kitchen and an adjacent “breakfast room” often shared what was essentially a single space spanning the width of

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<sup>37</sup> For “separate entrance” advertisements, see, e.g. “W.A.A. Brown’s Duplex Houses” in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 3, 1910, and the New York American’s *Annual Renting Guide to High Class Apartments*, 1911.

the apartment, separated nominally by a “trimmed opening,” a wide, doorless opening with jambs and lintel. As noted, some apartments had an enclosed front porch or sun parlor at front, usually duplicated upstairs in a smaller version, with the extra bedroom adjacent, over the vestibule.

All of the two-family houses have cellars, none with living spaces, though most had a laundry space with basin, and many had “storage” rooms (apart from coal storage). In a 1925 row of houses on East 93<sup>rd</sup> Street, architect Edward M. Adelson designated part of the basement a “play room” — as he did in his four-families in the neighborhood, as well as a group of two-family houses in Windsor Terrace.<sup>38</sup> Some specify wood floors in part of the cellar, suggesting the possibility of other uses for the space.

Most of the two-family homes were built with garages behind them on the lot, accessible via driveways between the semidetached houses.

#### *Four-family houses*

Of the twenty-two sets of houses, ten were built as rows of four-family dwellings, with two units on each floor — one in front and one in rear. (One is a set of three-family homes, with one unit on the first floor and two on the second.) These houses were built on the same size lots as the two-families, to the same width — generally twenty feet, six inches — and thus have facades that are generally indistinguishable from their two-family counterparts. They differ in their depth, which range from seventy-five to eighty-five feet, mostly being eighty feet deep on the one hundred-foot lot.

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<sup>38</sup> DOB folder 4628/11, plans.



Figure 4-13. In this pair of four-family houses on East 96th Street by Morris Rothstein (1924), each second floor has a one-bedroom apartment in front and one in the rear.

Like their two-family counterparts, these buildings generally also have a single front door. The vestibule behind leads to a single internal entry door. The entry hall leads to the doors to the two ground floor units, and the stairs. Most common is for the front unit to have a living room overlooking the street, with a kitchen behind it, and then the bath and bedroom. This arrangement would be mirrored in the rear apartment, except that, because there was no vestibule and hall taking up space, the rearmost section would be divided into two rooms — some combination of living room or parlor, dining room or another bedroom. However, there are also examples of front apartments with the bedroom facing the street, with dining room, kitchen and bath behind — no living room — while the rear apartment would be the same, except with a very small bedroom next to a small living room.

In these scenarios, the front and rear apartments are of comparable size, except for the space taken on the first floor by the hallway, but in others, the floor is divided between a larger front apartment and a very small one (Figure 4-14). For example, in a row on East 93<sup>rd</sup> Street designed by Peter Millman of S. Millman & Son, the front apartment has a living room, dining room and kitchen, and a bedroom, while the small rear unit consists of kitchen, bath, dining room and bedroom. As usual, the second floor is virtually identical, with the additional bedroom above the vestibule.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> DOB folder 4629/60 contains permit NB 13544, though these houses occupy lots 62-68.



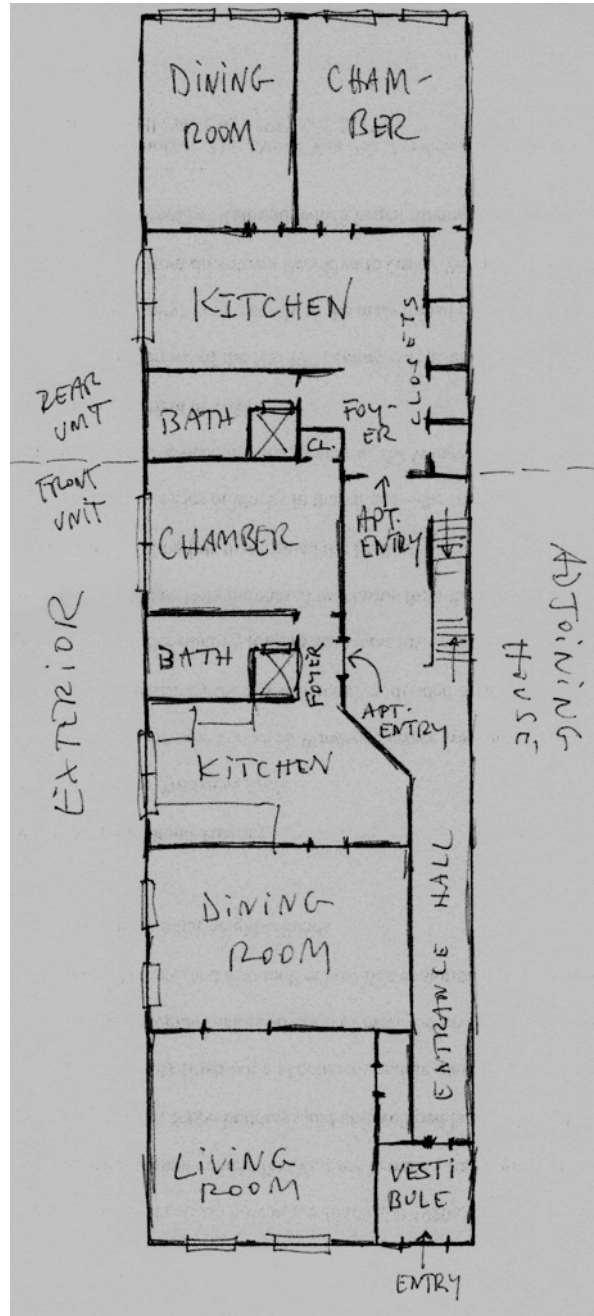
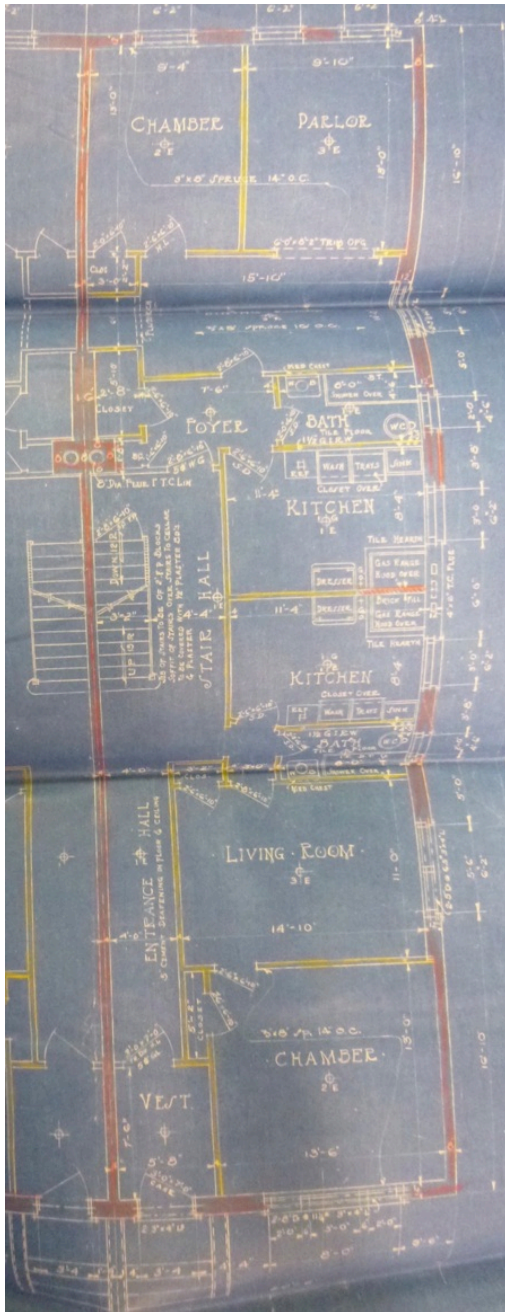


Figure 4-14. First floors of two four-family houses. Left: two three-room apartments by M.A. Cantor, East 96<sup>th</sup> Street (1923). Right, four-room apartment at front, and a smaller unit at rear, East 93<sup>rd</sup> Street (S. Millman & Son, 1926).

Millman submitted plans for another building of similar layout on another block of East 93<sup>rd</sup> Street. The first floor's back three-room apartment had one room labeled living room instead of dining room, while in the identical unit on the second floor, it was



labeled a dining room. However, an amendment to the Tenement House Department application indicates that the plan was altered to have “four-room apartments” on the second floor, rather than one five-room and one three-room unit.

The three-family row among the surveyed buildings was designed by Adelson for East 95<sup>th</sup> Street in 1925 (Figure 4-7).<sup>40</sup> Like his other houses, Adelson’s three-families contain a “play room” in the cellar. The cellars of the four-family houses otherwise resemble their two-family counterparts, with a laundry space, and sometimes a wood-floored area in addition to the overall concrete floor. The cellars are usually accessible via the main internal stair, as well as separately from the front exterior.

Although the lot coverage of the four-family houses left less free space, a number of them were built with garages behind them.

### **Occupants and Social Life**

Attempts to find real estate advertising for the housing developed in Northeast Flatbush in the 1920s in general English-language newspapers did not yield substantial results. The New York State Census (1925) and United States Census (1930) confirm that the original residents of the neighborhood were almost exclusively first- and second-generation Jewish immigrants, primarily of Russian, Yiddish-speaking origin. It seems likely, therefore, that the marketing of this housing was directed specifically through foreign-language Jewish community media. However, these same census records offer some insight into the economic status of the neighborhood’s residents and the patterns of their domestic life. Nearly all the residents were either Russian-born or the children of

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<sup>40</sup> DOB folder 4669/63, Tenement House Dept. plan 955-1925.

Russian-born parents — a much smaller number having Austria, Hungary or Romania as their or their parents' origin — and, if they were immigrants themselves, had Yiddish as their first language.

The houses at 202 to 260 East 93<sup>rd</sup> Street, the block front on the west side of East 93<sup>rd</sup> between Winthrop Street and Clarkson Avenue, are nineteen two-family houses built in 1925, and designed by Adelsohn.<sup>41</sup> Their plans specify two bedrooms on the ground floor, and three on the second floor, plus sun porch, dining room, living room, and kitchen/breakfast room. The 1930 Census shows that in each house, the owner occupied one of the units.<sup>42</sup> The owners were a mixture of skilled workers, including bricklayers and plasterers, and owners of small businesses such as tailor shops or butter and egg wholesalers, as well as an insurance broker, a real estate broker — and Alex Graifer, the builder who had bought the block from Nissenson to develop the houses it. The renters in these houses partly overlapped in occupation with the owners. The “heads” of renter households included a bricklayer, owners of a garage and a movie theater — as well as factory operatives.

The households were typically four to five members of a single family, in which unmarried children in their 20s or 30s were living with their parents, often along with a grandparent or a widowed relation. At least one household numbered as many as eight people, including a daughter and son-in-law of the head, their two young children, and a boarder. Where residence in the previous Census in 1920 could be found, the residents

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<sup>41</sup> DOB folder 4628/11, plans.

<sup>42</sup> 15th U.S. Census, Brooklyn, N.Y., Enumeration District 24-772, sheets 32A-34A (1930).

typically moved to these houses from Brownsville or the adjacent area to the north across Eastern Parkway.

On the east side of 105-151 East 95<sup>th</sup> Street, between Rutland Road and Winthrop Street, is a row of sixteen four-family houses, possibly also designed by Adelson, who did apparently design the garages found behind each house.<sup>43</sup> The owners of these houses are a similar group: two insurance agents, carpenters and other building workers, small businessmen, and two garment workers: a fur cutter and a finisher of men's clothes. The renters have similar profiles as in the two-family houses on East 93<sup>rd</sup> Street. Most of the four-family houses have one unit occupied by the owner, but a few are entirely rented out. Again, available Census evidence of where these residents came to Northeast Flatbush from points mainly to Brownsville and the adjacent area to the north, though one family had previously lived in Borough Park.

Notably, though the units are smaller than those in the two-family houses above, many of the households as listed in the Census are larger: six or seven members in many cases, and in the case of the family owning one unit, ten family members are listed. In all of the neighborhood dwellings, the size of the families listed as living in apartments described in plans as having only one or two bedrooms, with or without other rooms such as parlors, sun porches or music rooms, suggests that these latter types of rooms frequently functioned in reality as additional bedrooms.

One unit is listed as having a "Negro" servant, living with a family of three whose head was an insurance agent and his wife a schoolteacher. One unit in another row of

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<sup>43</sup> 15th U.S. Census, Brooklyn, N.Y., Enumeration District 24-773, sheets 17A-20A (1930). The 1922 filing found in DOB folder 4614/57 for these houses is for two-family houses by Adolph Goldberg, so the actual plans of these houses were not found.

four-family houses on East 96<sup>th</sup> Street also was recorded as having a black servant, a household headed by a widowed man with no occupation listed.<sup>44</sup>

This same row of ten four-families on East 96<sup>th</sup> Street was built in 1923 by a local builder, Sam Lapidus of the Elm Building Corp. on Rockaway Parkway. Designed by Jack Fein, its plans show the ground floor divided into a larger one-bedroom unit with living and dining room, and a small three-room unit (kitchen, dining room, chamber), and two equal four-room units upstairs. A similar array of occupants is found, with similar previous residences. Four of the units in those 10 houses had one to three lodgers listed as residing with families in the larger apartments (as indicated by rent amount), but lodgers were not commonly found in many other houses.

### **The Tapestry Brick Multifamily: Beyond the House/Tenement Dichotomy**

In “Examining the American Dream: Housing Standards and the Emergence of a National Housing Culture, 1900-1930,” Thomas C. Hubka and Judith T. Kenny discuss “the first major period of popular housing construction” in the 1900-1930 period as one that “significantly narrowed the historic boundaries defining domestic space that previously separated middle- and working-class households.” They suggest that

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<sup>44</sup> 15th U.S. Census, Brooklyn, N.Y., Enumeration District 24-774, sheets 17A-19A (1930). The 1939 *WPA Guide to New York*, in its description of East Flatbush, reported that “[t]he corner of Rutland Road and East Ninety-fifth Street, in the eastern part, is locally known as the ‘slave market,’ because Negro domestic workers gather here daily on the sidewalk and offer their services at hourly rates.” *The WPA Guide to New York City: The Federal Writer’s Project Guide to 1930s New York* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), 497.

scholarship focusing on the “extremes” of the spectrum between “comfortable, single-family suburban housing” and “squalid conditions of tenement life” have overshadowed an understanding of the improvement of much working-class housing closer to “middle-class” standards during this period. This improvement was achieved both through the remodeling of older working-class cottages and the adaptation of plans and standards derived from single-family housing — the dining room, the porch, the garage — to small multi-unit dwellings. Hubka and Kenny note in particular the brick Chicago “four-flat,” a long, brick house that adapts the brick Chicago bungalow to four-family living (Figure 4-15) with results that are familiar after an examination of Brooklyn’s 1920s four-family houses.<sup>45</sup>



Figure 4-15. Chicago bungalow-style brick "four flat" (from Hubka and Kenny 2006)

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<sup>45</sup> *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 13, no. 1 (2006), 49-69.



In Northeast Flatbush, we see the Tapestry Brick house evolving from its row house origins in a parallel manner to the four-flat, as a housing form that also represents this overlooked, porous boundary between “working class” and “middle class.” It partakes of the exterior form of the house, with its twenty-foot width, low, two-story profile, semi-detached construction, and single entrance for as many as four units, a streetscape ornamented by a decorative standard adopted by the generation of immigrant architects who themselves belong mostly to the eastern Brooklyn Jewish community. At the same time, however, it is more variegated internally, with similar buildings housing either two or four families, owned and rented by residents representing a range of economic statuses within this community

## Conclusion

Even as architectural historians and preservationists have turned more attention to vernacular architecture of many eras, and to such artifacts of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century mass housing as the six-story tenement, the “white brick” New York City apartment house and the post-World War II suburb, Tapestry Brick dwellings remain a conspicuously overlooked element of New York’s built environment. This oversight in the architectural and social history of the city has consequences for its preservationists.

Writing in 1961, sociologist Daniel Bell argued,

In economic terms, New York is an iceberg. The visible portions are the theaters, art galleries, museums, universities, publishing houses, restaurants, night clubs, *espresso* cafes, smart stores — all the activities that give the city its peculiarly glittering place as the metropolis of America. Yet the base of New York’s economic structure is largely unseen.<sup>1</sup>

Bell was writing about the economy of the city, but also about what is, and is not, visually perceived as constituting its substance. In order to be convincing interpreters and advocates for what is historically and architecturally significant, preservationists have a particular responsibility to see the city in its entirety — not merely the tip of the iceberg. Without a complete understanding of the history and meaning of the whole cityscape, preservationists are not only liable to overlook potential historic resources, but will also be ill-equipped to fully understand the historic function, relative significance,

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Bell, “The Three Faces of New York,” *Dissent* 8 (Summer 1961), 224.

and context of acknowledged resources. Tapestry Brick architecture is a relatively commonplace sight in New York City, but that does mean that its value does not face threats that call for preservation efforts (Figures 5-1, 5-2).



Figure 5-1. New construction in Axel Hedman's row on President Street.



Figure 5-2. An addition obscures a distinctive multicolor Tapestry Brick façade.

Tapestry Brick dwellings are a manifestation of central historical, urbanistic and architectural developments of twentieth-century New York. They represent much of the unprecedented wave of construction that gave the city the basic shape we are familiar with today: the contours of its settlement out to the fringes of its land, and the low-rise residential expanses that are the necessary counterpart to its vertical core. This era of home building included other types of residences, as well. But the Tapestry Brick dwelling was distinctive as a form characteristic of the “subway suburb” of the 1920s, in which the city’s population spread out within its borders, and prefiguring the aspirations of the later, more far-flung postwar suburb.

The Tapestry Brick dwelling was an adaptation and outgrowth of the New York City row house into a unique lower middle-class and working-class hybrid form. Spanning eras of transformation of New York’s landscape, Tapestry Brick dwellings arose in the 1910s as a novel style of single-family row house, designed by the hands that were also still designing corniced and bow-fronted houses. They were built for middle-class families in neighborhoods like Windsor Terrace, already connected to Downtown Brooklyn and Manhattan via early mass transit links, or being developed in anticipation of the expanding subway. These rows of attached one- and two-family homes had brick façades topped by a flat parapet in a variety of decorative shapes, still sometimes above a fragmentary cornice or a Spanish-style tile-topped molding.

With the housing shortage that followed World War I, and a broad demand for new and better homes, the Tapestry Brick house was transformed from this middle-class residence to a home for a broader demographic: working-class families prosperous enough to move out of crowded tenement neighborhoods in Manhattan and Brooklyn into

new enclaves. In a place like Northeast Flatbush, members of an immigrant community formed a new neighborhood dominated by low-scale, semidetached buildings that, to the street, suggested a private house, but inside, held two to four apartments, each perhaps with an extended family residing in it. A two-family house could mean the privacy and space of a whole floor to one's household — as well as an investment for the owner. But it could also mean, in a four-family house, relatively crowded occupancy of very modest apartments. In this respect, residential life was still similar to life in the old tenements, yet the newly built houses had improved amenities such as bathrooms and kitchens that represented a distinct step up.

These houses were developed and designed by members of the community for which they were built. Drawing on the eclectic innovations that arose by a previous generation of architects, they evolved, in the hands of a new group of largely immigrant architects into a highly distinct style characterized by the intensive use of brick patterns and parapet shapes in highly two-dimensional but richly embroidered facades.

In the case of Northeast Flatbush, that original Jewish community has moved on, taking with it one chapter of the neighborhood's history. But the physical streetscape remains largely unchanged, and continues to shape the life of the neighborhood.

Northeast Flatbush is an example of a potential historic district embodying the important social and architectural developments of the 1920s that the Tapestry Brick dwelling represents. It was developed in a short period by a discrete group of builders seeking to appeal to a particular market — fellow Jews ready and able to move to a new kind of neighborhood near the community's commercial center, Brownsville. These developers turned to a discrete, locally based set of architects, who worked in the common



architectural language of Tapestry Brick to design the houses that predominate in the neighborhood, as well as the commercial blocks and many of the larger apartment buildings that punctuate it.

Despite superficial alterations, not surprising where the significance of the architecture has gone unrecognized, this building stock remains largely intact it was developed. Northeast Flatbush is therefore a good candidate for preservation designation, such as a New York City Landmarks or National Register historic district. Another, smaller example, is the 1912 Vanderveer Place, a one-block street that is among the earliest versions of house rows in transition to Tapestry Brick parapets, retains exceptional integrity (Figure 5-3).



Figure 5-3. South side of Vanderveer place, with early flat parapets over cornices.

And in a neighborhood like Windsor Terrace, where examples of the Tapestry Brick dwelling in different stages of its evolution exist alongside the Neoclassical row houses that preceded them, preservation efforts should take account of the significance of these houses in their own right in the continuous development of the neighborhood. An existing historic district, Prospect Lefferts Gardens, provides an example of how Tapestry Brick dwellings, if better understood, might have been included in the designation: rows of unusually elaborate, early Tapestry Brick dwellings on both sides of Parkside Avenue, and the south side of Winthrop Street, between Flatbush and Bedford Avenues (Figure 5-4).



Figure 5-4. Early Tapestry Brick dwellings outside the Prospect Lefferts Gardens historic district.

The intensity of building in the outer boroughs in the 1920s means that Tapestry Brick dwellings can be found in smaller groups and individual examples in other areas too. Perhaps reflecting more specifications more closely tailored to smaller, individual project, in contrast to a large speculative development, such examples include extraordinary designs, which should be considered for recognition as individual landmarks of this historic type: two examples of exuberant brickwork in Sunset Park, for example (Figure 5-5).



Figure 5-5. Exceptional brickwork on 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, Sunset Park.

But these houses are not valuable only for their dizzyingly exceptional design. They are each a small piece of a much larger story of how a wide array of historical circumstances and actors in New York — from Senator Calder to Morris Rothstein, from the IRT to the real estate tax exemption — shaped the modern city in brick and (a little but of) stone.

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